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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CHARTING THE TERRITORY:

a study of feminism in English-Canadian drama from 1967 to 1991

by

MARLENE A. D. LYNNE VAN LUVEN ©

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled CHARTING THE TERRITORY: A study of feminism in English-Canadian drama from 1967 to 1991, submitted by MARLENE A. D. LYNNE VAN LUVEN in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Diane E. Bessai

Supervisor

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D. L. Wilkie

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Date Oct 7, 1991

Abstract

Over the past 30 years, Canadian drama gradually has come to reflect changes precipitated by the development of feminist thought in North America and Europe. Although it would be inaccurate to describe Canadian theatre as a hotbed of feminist drama, sound, well-executed feminist plays are being written and performed nationwide on a regular basis. This thesis charts the growth in English-Canadian feminist drama from the late 1960s to the present.

A context for the thesis's argument is provided in a brief discussion in Chapter I of the development of feminist drama in Britain and the United States, a cursory overview of the main streams of feminist criticism, and a summation of Canadian theatre history. The 29 plays analyzed are organized for discussion purposes as follows: Chapter II focuses upon feminist reclamation of history and examines Red Emma (premièred in 1974); Diane Grant's What Glorious Times They Had (1974); Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days (1983); Mavis Gallant's What Is To Be Done? (1982); and Linda Griffiths's Maggie & Pierre (1979). These attempts to represent women's lives through women's consciousness are contrasted with a male playwright's version of a moment in women's history, John Murrell's Waiting for the Parade, premièred in 1977.

Chapter III explores the theme of women's struggle towards self-definition despite the limitations of domesticity. The plays discussed are Gwen Pharis Ringwood's The Lodge, written in the

1970s; Beverley Simons's Crabdance, premièred in 1972; Sharon Pollock's Blood Relations(1980); Margaret Hollingsworth's War Babies (1984); Pamela Boyd's Inside Out (1986); and Wendy Lill's Memories of You (1988). Eight plays which explore female sexuality are studied in Chapter IV -- Sharon Stearns's Hooking for Paradise(1981); Betty Lambert's Jennie's Story (1981) and Under the Skin (1985); Judith Thompson's The Crackwalker (1980), White Biting Dog (1984), and I Am Yours (1987); and Margaret Hollingworth's Alli Alli Oh (1977) and its sequel, Islands (1983). Chapter V focuses upon the dramatic characterization of native women, dealing with George Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe (1967); Linda Griffiths's and Maria Campbell's Jessica (1981); Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters (1986) and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing (1989); and Monica Mojica's Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots (1990). And finally, Chapter VI explores four recent and accomplished feminist plays influenced by principles of collective creation -- Smoke Damage (1983); This is for you, Anna (1984); Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) (1988), and Aphra (1991).

PREFACE

"Why can't a woman/be more like a man?" That peevish complaint, voiced by actor Rex Harrison as the pedagogue Henry Higgins, has long roosted noisily and uneasily in the back of my mind. I was nine years old innocent of drama and apparently forever marooned in rural Saskatchewan in 1956 when My Fair Lady, Alan Jay Lerner's and Frederick Loewe's musical rendition of George Bernard Shaw's anti-romantic 1913 play Pygmalion, made its New York debut. And I was a teenager when I finally saw the 1964 movie version of that musical, wherein Harrison/Higgins, expresses his exasperation with female difference.

But even when I was a gauche teenager, Higgins's remark never seemed very funny to me -- although I didn't really know why it irritated me instead of making me laugh. However, its implication, and the weight of hundreds of comments like it, eventually contributed to my decision to seek feminist content in drama, particularly English-Canadian drama. And now I think I understand why Higgins's remark set my teeth on edge.

The question, "Why can't a woman/be more like a man?" quite blatantly discounts the depth and variety of female being. In fact, Higgins's objection to his protege's non-maleness suggests that what he finds unmanageable -- and thus intolerable -- about the Cockney street urchin Eliza is her otherness. Higgins is discomtitted by this difference: it does not reflect his dogmatic picture of the way things should be, and this divergence from his "norm" threatens his control of the situation. He is, after all, a traditional figure of male authority, The Professor. As the omniscient, controlling intellect, his power is great: he can educate Eliza out of the improper speech patterns of the working class into which she was born; he can even efface her street-urchin's manners. But he CANNOT change the fact of her otherness -- that she has been born female, that she has de-stabilized his fixed world view, and (horrors) that he finds himself drawn to this otherness. The only way the reality of this difference may be managed, the movie suggests, is by romance, which blurs the separation between self and other, and which requires that Eliza reconstitute herself to become a genteel "lady" who will adapt to society's mores out of love and thus cease to disrupt convention. In this way, the movie utterly betrays the tone of Shaw's play, which is all about Higgins's overweening ego, his lust to prove his prowess as a linguist by transforming poor Eliza's squawking vowels into genteel -- if vapid -- mellifluence. In his usual didactic way, in order to make a social point about class and snobbery, Shaw takes great pains to avoid a romantic connection between Higgins and Eliza. Instead, despite the professor's grudging fondness for Eliza, Shaw marries her off to Freddie, who, although poor and somewhat dim, is, after all, a gentleman in need of a wife -- not a superior, self-sufficient intellectual and confirmed bachelor as is Higgins. Shaw's insistence within *Pygmalion* that there can be no romance between Eliza and Higgins is entirely lost in *My Fair Lady*, which turns pointed social commentary into mere shallow romance.

In my early years, before I understood such sexual-political nuances, I conducted numerous internal dialogues with Dr. Higgins and his ilk, in which (my resentment barely disguised by a thin-lipped smile) I voiced a flippant rejoinder of my own: "*But why can't a man/be more like a woman?*" Of course, those exchanges led nowhere, as nowhere they could go. But much later I recognized such internal chatter as the precursor of my feminism. By then, I was struggling with the difficulty of creating a representation -- be it in a brief conversation, a playscript, daily communication, or lasting personal relationship -- which reflects both the female and male ways of being, without setting one over the other, yet gives female utterance the attention it has for so long been denied.

As I began to attend the theatre twenty years ago, first as a hobby, then out of a growing critical interest, I noticed that few of the plays I saw placed female experience at the core of their dramatic narratives. And although many plays, both classic and contemporary, were lauded for their "universal" human values, they seemed to represent largely a male world, dramatizing male problems from a male point of view. Surprisingly, I found that even university drama courses, which presented a fixed canon of classic and traditional plays chosen for their "universality," rarely included plays in which women were heroic central characters. As powerful as I found such "seminal" modern plays as John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* or Arthur Miller's *Death of A Salesman* when I first encountered them, I felt they said very little about female human experience. In fact, when plays focused closely upon male characters' tribulations, women were often depicted as part of the "problem," in that they made demands which further burdened an already tottering or tormented male psyche.

Finally, in 1985, seeking proof that women's concerns could indeed be the topic of contemporary drama, I began to read English-Canadian playscripts, concentrating upon work written from 1960 on. I found that although many women playwrights were hard at work, until very recently few of them had received national acclaim. Furthermore, it became evident that since Canadian drama began to blossom in the 1970s, women had been writing steadily increasing numbers of plays, many of which reflected a feminist sensibility, I was relieved and gratified to find that women characters did not need to become "more like a man" in order to have their stories told on Canadian stages.

Charting the Territory, a study of feminism in English-Canadian drama from 1967 to 1991, represents my effort to reflect women's concerns in contemporary Canadian drama. Since the very idea of a "canon" of works suggests an unfeminist methodology of hierarchy based upon exclusion, I did not set out to compile a list which categorizes plays as "feminist" or "non-feminist." Instead, this study examines a body of dramatic work and draws from it proof of a growing focus upon women-centred plays. Studying such an array of plays, most of them created by women, has convinced me that powerful feminist scripts are being written and produced across the country. Furthermore, such dramas frequently focus upon women characters and/or dilemmas which reflect women's lives. The most challenging plays studied here incorporate both male and female experience, thereby appealing to as broad an audience as possible. Nevertheless, such plays are consistently predicated upon the worth and validity of women's lives. One wonders what Henry Higgins -- and his creator G.B. Shaw -- would make of them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank everyone who has accompanied me on the past half-dozen years of charting territory, especially my supervisor Dr. Diane Bessai, who tolerated frequent detours and delays; all my loyal friends who exhorted me to persevere despite the many obstacles blocking my route; and my family members, who are profoundly thankful the journey has come to an end at last.

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Chapter I

> In a male supremacist culture, the male condition is taken to be the human condition, so that, when any man speaks -- for instance, as an artist, historian or philosopher -- he speaks objectively -- that is, as someone who has, by definition, no special bone to pick . . . he is somehow an embodiment of the norm. Women, on the other hand, are not men. Therefore women are, by virtue of male logic, not the norm, a different, lower order of being . . . ."
>
> -- Andrea Dworkin, Our Blood[1]

i

Sexual-political discourse has changed greatly since Andrea Dworkin's early, impassioned diatribes against the "male supremacy" of North American culture. Following the publication of such primary feminist critiques as Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex in 1949, Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique in 1963 and Kate Millet's Sexual Politics in 1969, and the multifarious activities of the women's liberation movement throughout the 1970s, cultural critics began to recognize that feminist thought offers new perspectives on many other disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, economics, sociology and philosophy. And once a social force such as feminism found a public voice, ramifications of its philosophy began to find representation in a variety of artistic endeavours.

Over the past thirty years, as feminist drama in North America and Europe has grown into an identifiable, multi-faceted collection of works, it has attempted to identify and challenge an "embedded masculine vision of the world."[2] Helene Keyssar states that feminist drama emerged as a "distinct theatrical genre" in the late 1960s in both Britain and the United States (1). Critic Elizabeth J. Natalle noted in 1985 that "100 feminist theatre groups have emerged in the United States since 1969."[3] In Canada, strong women playwrights developed from the outset of the contemporary theatre movement, which began in the early 1960s, and sterling examples of feminist theatre can be found in the work of many English-Canadian playwrights, including Beverly Simons, Sharon Pollock, Wendy Lill, Judith Thompson, and Margaret Hollingsworth.[4]

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[1] Andrea Dworkin, Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics (New York: Perigree Books, 1976), p. 51.

If feminism is generally defined as a "movement from the point of view of, by, and for women,"[5] it becomes easy to see why the modern-day women's movement -- which was built upon basic freedoms established by turn-of-the-century suffragists and, following the social upheaval of the Second World War, expanded in the late 1960s and early 1970s into broader social protest -- has objected to the entrenched cultural assumption that men's behaviours and perceptions represented reality for all humanity. Over the past decade, feminist playwrights and critics have noted the dearth of women in all areas of conventional theatre and have challenged the "universality" of theatre which largely reflects only male values as conveyed by male playwrights. In Britain, The Women's Playhouse Trust, established in 1981 to redress the inequities between men and women in British theatre, published a 1982-83 study of women's status in the drama world. As a result, the 1986 Cork Report confirmed that British women "were forced to operate on the periphery of cultural life both through lack of funding and through actual, if not intentional, discrimination against their efforts to produce both classic and innovatory work."[6] In 1982, Montreal director Rina Fraticelli, in her report The Status of Women in Canadian Theatre, established the concept of "the Invisibility Factor," to draw attention to the few women employed as professionals in the Canadian theatre industry. In 1983, Fraticelli wrote:

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[2] Helen Keyssar, Feminist Theatre (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985), p. 11.

[3] Elizabeth J. Natalle, Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion (Methuchen, N.Y.: Scarecrow Press, 1985), p. 1-2.

[4] Keyssar, Feminist Theatre, pp. 55, 117. Keyssar identifies Megan Terry's Calm Down Mother (1965) as American theatre's first clearly feminist play, and identifies Maureen Duffy's Rites (1969) as its British counterpart. Beverly Simons's Crabdance, Canada's first such play, premiered in the United States in 1969 and did not make its Canadian debut until 1972.

[5] Alice A. Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 15.

> From determining which subjects may be considered appropriate for the stage (and which dismissed as "domestic" or "trivial") to what constitutes theatricality, the authority and power to endow quality and therefore legitimacy in cultural products resides in the hands/desks/theatres/columns/bank accounts of men.[7]

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[6] "Women's Playhouse Trust, The History," program notes for Beside Herself, by Sarah Daniels (London: Methuen, 1990), np.

[7] Rina Fraticelli, " 'Any Black Crippled Woman Can!' or A feminist's notes from outside the sheltered workshop," Room of One's Own 8 (Summer 1983), 7-18.

A further reflection of her point of view is echoed by Jeannette Laillou Savona and Ann Wilson who maintain that, "texts or theatrical practices which are deemed unimportant or marginal in Academe are often vital to feminist research, which tends to ignore both élitist value judgements and exclusions based on underlying biased premises."[8] However, American academic Sue-Ellen Case notes that feminism has had a "radical" effect upon "all aspects of theatre, changing theatre history and becoming a major element in twentieth-century theatre practice."[9] Furthermore, she thinks that polemical writing is no longer needed when discussing feminist theatre because such drama has successfully challenged "patriarchal prescriptions" and no longer must argue for its own existence (4).

ii

Whatever forms feminist drama takes, whatever subjects it embraces, in creating for the stage a broader picture of women's experience to redress gaps in the existing theatrical "canon," it often reveals or comments upon pernicious societal assumptions about gender. One of the most crucial assumptions addressed by feminist playwrights -- whether overtly or covertly -- is the idea, called into question by French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, that women are "Other" and therefore inferior, because they are not men.[10] Writing over forty years ago, de Beauvoir maintained that what society called "femininity" is not a natural occurrence but a cultural construct; in other words, one isn't born a woman, one becomes one -- and does so according to her society's definitions of correct womanhood. In a patriarchal culture, where the primacy of the father ensures a dominant male power structure, proper womanhood has been defined as docile and domestic, in all ways supportive of existing societal values. Feminist drama also explores traditional views that women, by virtue of their inferior status, cannot be the "Subject" of their own lives, but function primarily as the "Object," secondary to the true "heroic" subject. Thus women's roles are shaped and defined by the needs of the male characters on stage with them, to suit the expectations of the male spectator who is assumed to be all spectators. Once a playwright accepts the validity of woman as Subject, she is led to question the roots of the "man-made" construct known as Woman.[11] (In objecting to the values conveyed by traditional theatre, French feminist and critic Hélène Cixous wrote that unless women attend theatre as a political gesture intended to challenge society's status quo, they lend "complicity to the sadism directed against [them and] assume, in the patriarchal family structure that the theatre produces ad infinitum, the position of victim."[12])

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[8] Jeannette Laillou Savona and Ann Wilson, "Introduction" to Special Issue on "Women in the Theatre," Modern Drama 32 (March 1989), 1.

[9] Sue-Ellen Case, Feminism and Theatre (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 4.

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[10] Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), xix.

[11] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16 3 (Autumn 1975), 11.

In addition, one of the more recent projects of some feminist thinkers, particularly those who address the limitations of "Anglo-American feminist criticism," has been to challenge the power of "male-centred humanism," with its emphasis upon rationality and its tendency to explain human striving as a struggle between bi-polar opposites wherein "male" values (rationality, competition, linearity and individuality) are deemed superior to "female" traits (emotionality, nurturance, inclusiveness and co-operation).[13]

Dramatic articulation from a female perspective challenges existing ideals of theatre and demands critical assessment, for which existing theories, such as naturalism or the Aristotelian dictum that drama is tied to a linear (beginning-middle-end) structure which must contain conflict, climax, recognition and resolution, prove unsatisfactory or inadequate.[14] However, as Lynda Hart pointed out in 1989, concerted efforts at a feminist theatre critique have been scant when compared with feminist criticism of poetry and prose over the past two decades.[15] But the growth in woman-centred drama has begun to stimulate the gradual development of a critical language and a critical methodology.

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[12] Helene Cixous, "Aller a la Mer," translated by Barbara Kerslake, Modern Drama 27 (1984), 546-48 passim.

[13] Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 87.

[14] Aristotle, Poetics, translated by Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1970).

[15] Lynda Hart in "Introduction: Performing Feminism in Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), p. 1.

Sue-Ellen Case sets 1985 as the date by which "feminist theory had taken its place in the mainstream of the philosophical and critical application of ideas" (112). But she also cautions that feminist theory occupies a "problematic position" within the feminist movement because many feminists "consider the pursuit of theory to be élitist" (112). Nevertheless, she sees a definite place for feminist critical practice within the study of drama:

> Feminist critics and historians began to reconstruct the history of women in theatre, using the goals of consciousness-raising groups and social activists: to make women visible, to find their voice, to recover the works that the dominant history suppressed and to explain the historical process of the suppression of women and its effect on their achievements. At the same time, critics used these political strategies to create new ways to read a play, to view a production and to deconstruct the canon of dramatic criticism. (113)

Case argues that bringing feminism into the theatre in the above manner will lead to a feminist "new poetics" which will "deconstruct the traditional systems of representation and perception of women and posit women in the position of the subject" (115). Such a poetic would guard against reductionism or didacticism, she says, because it would "borrow freely" from the pool of current ideas:

> . . . new discoveries about gender and culture from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and political science; feminist strategies for reading texts from the new work in English studies; psychosemiotic analyses of performance and representation from recent film theory; new theories of the 'subject' from psychosemiotics, post-modern criticism

> and post-structuralism; and certain strategies from the project called 'deconstruction'. (115)

By drawing upon such a multiplicity of ideas, Case intends that feminist criticism will be inclusive rather than exclusive in choosing its tools of analysis and evaluation. Such a view, however, is idealistic, easier to articulate than to practise since women playwrights and critics are, of course, products of their own culture, speaking out of their own subjective experience -- even though their dramatic and critical training may have valorized the "objective" voice. In fact, as Case herself concedes, most critical arguments are conducted in such a voice, even though feminism recognizes that this "impersonal, omniscient and seemingly objective voice" has long been used by patriarchal culture to "render certain experiences invisible and to gain power through the printed word" (3).

iii

As even a cursory reading of current feminist theory makes plain, feminist thought is far from homogenous. Despite the claims of its detractors, feminism is not fuelled by a "monolithic ideology."[16] Nor is feminist criticism uncritical of itself. Indeed, since the mid-1980s, some feminist theoreticians have shifted their gaze from the sins of the patriarchy to the lapses within their own practitioners. Academics such as Toril Moi believe that if feminists do not challenge each other, their dialogue will be "stifled by the absence of a genuinely critical debate about the political implications of its methodological and theoretical choices" (xiii). Adherence to the idea of sisterhood, Moi maintains, provides no "constructive contribution to the feminist struggle" if it requires polite half-truths about political differences (xiv).

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[16] Rosemarie Tong, Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction (Boulder, Colorado:, Westview Press), pp. 1-9 passim.

Even though one glimpses few playwrights huddled in poorly illuminated backstage corners, hunched over diverse texts by feminist thinkers, a brief definition of the major branches of contemporary feminist philosophy is nevertheless vital to a clear discussion of both feminist drama and feminist critical theories. Critics Jeannette Laillou Savona and Ann Wilson claim that feminist research is "interdisciplinary in nature" and identify two features common to feminist theories:

> On the one hand, they strive to dismantle, or destabilize existing dominant viewpoints which have consistently ignored, devalued, or silenced women. On the other, they attempt to create alternate visions and processes of thought which are meant to modify and even revolutionize so-called 'fundamental' knowledge in all disciplines. (2)

For the purposes of this thesis, a helpful reference is professor Jill Dolan's excellent book, The Feminist Spectator as Critic.[17] Commenting on the "playful pluralism" of many aspects of American feminist thought, Dolan separates it into three main streams, liberal feminism, cultural or radical feminism and materialist feminism, identifying herself as a materialist feminist (2). She defines liberal feminism as drawing its ideas from liberal humanism, suggesting that action within existing societal structures will secure women parity with men. Liberal feminist playwrights, she says, "accept the notion that theatre communicates universally and prefer not to be particularized as women" (3).

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[17] Jill Dolan, The Feminist Spectator as Critic (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Group, 1988).

Dolan links the present stream of cultural feminism with the radical feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. Her main objection to cultural feminism is that it is "founded on a reification of sexual difference that valorizes female biology, in which gender is an immutable, determining and desirable category" (6). Materialist feminism, Dolan maintains, posits the gender debate in more neutral terms and "deconstructs the mythic subject woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations" (10). Dolan sees materialist feminism as more open-ended than either liberal or cultural feminism:

> Rather than considering gender polarization as the victimization of only women, materialist feminism considers it a social construct oppressive to both women and men. In materialist discourse, gender is not innate. Rather it is dictated through enculturation, as gender divisions are placed at the service of the dominant culture's ideology . . . . Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes, an arrangement of relationships that also prescribes sexuality. Far from reifying sexual difference, materialist feminism works to understand how women have been oppressed by gender categories. It attempts to denaturalize the dominant ideology that demands and maintains such oppressive social arrangements. (11)

In addition, philosophers such as Rosemarie Tong have identified within the edifice known as contemporary feminism a crowded anteroom full of psychoanalytic feminist theorists, who find the "root of women's oppression embedded deep in [their] psyche," and an austere back hallway inhabited by Marxist feminists who say women's liberation can never be achieved within the class society "where the wealth produced by the powerless many ends up in the hands of the powerful few" (2,3). The latest, although it is unlikely to be the last, chime of the doorbell at the now-crowded feminist manor has brought additional company in the form of the post-modern feminists, who resist attempts to integrate the various feminisms. The "pmfs" are skeptical of any quest for the "one, true, feminist story of reality," regarding it as tainted with "phallocentric" thought (7).

Of late, Anglo-American feminist philosophy has been influenced by various voices from within the cacophony that is French feminism. As Toril Moi explains, French feminism was flourishing by 1974, but "took a considerable period to reach women outside France" because of its " 'heavy' intellectual profile" (96). Moi describes French feminists as "steeped" in Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger as well as "Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis," but sees them as powerful contributors "to the debate about the nature of women's oppression, the construction of sexual difference and the specificity of women's relations to language and writing" (96). French feminists, Moi writes, have been "curiously willing to accept the established patriarchal canon of 'great' literature, particularly the exclusively male pantheon of French modernism from Lautreamont to Artaud or Bataille" (97). Nevertheless, such theorists as Hélène Cixous, herself a playwright (whose alleged reaction to traditional theatre, Lynda Hart reports, was to stop going because she found it like attending her own funeral), Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have raised fascinating questions about women's relationship to language and writing.

Judith Graves Miller has studied the multiple expressions of playwrights influenced by the French feminists and maintains that, although the term feminist is "even more politically volcanic in French than in English . . . . there are no women going into French theatre who have not on some level had to confront the issue of women's creative autonomy within the theatrical endeavor."[18] Miller cites a number of "categories and practices" of concern to women in French theatre:

> exalting values and experiences considered to be "feminine" or women centred, criticizing the exploitation of women in patriarchy, dramatizing the experiences of forgotten women, questioning and revisioning the myths of the Western tradition, creating roles for actresses in which the performers do not feel they are playing out men's fantasies, and showing how gender is constructed through social interactions and expectations. (8)

Not surprisingly, these concerns are shared by North American and

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[18] Judith Graves Miller, "Contemporary Women's Voices in French Theatre, Modern Drama 32 (March 1989), 8.

British playwrights as well.[19] However, Miller cautions that:

> one must be wary of confusing, as do some theorists, certain characteristics of post-modern theatre, such as multiple discourses, an absence of linear plotting, the escription of silence on stage, or the impossibility of mastering discourse -- as exclusively 'feminine.' True, women playwrights do put to use many of these techniques. They forego traditional texts and conventional forms and attempt to alter the audience's experience of theatre. However, their goal in most instances is political. They do not, as is frequent among many post-modern artists, evade political questions and play with the possibility of meaning. (19)

Jill Dolan insists that one of tasks of any feminist critique is to "unmask the naturalized ideology of the dominant culture most theatre and performance represents" (16). In philosopher Toril Moi's view, "the principal objective of feminist criticism has always been political: it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices" (xiv). All of this suggests that the feminist critic, more than any other, must be in possession of a lucid assessment of the culture in which she is embedded, and must be aware of her reaction to it both politically and personally. Otherwise, she is likely to make the same assumptions of generality for which she chastises traditional critics.

---

[19] Helene Keyssar makes the point in Feminist Theatre (xiii) that English playwrights frequently write out of a socialist consciousness while their American counterparts formulate their dramas on a psychological basis.

iv

Aiming as it does to win recognition for women's subjective utterance within the realm of public discourse, feminist drama is frequently propelled by complex subversive intentions. Lynda Hart contends:

> the woman playwright's voice reaches a community of spectators in a public place that has historically been regarded as a highly subversive, politicized environment. The theatre is the sphere most removed from the confines of domesticity, thus the woman who ventures to be heard in this space takes a greater risk than the poet or novelist, but it may offer her greater potential for effecting social change.[20]

In the most basic sense, then, the woman playwright, by virtue of her public pursuit of a "platform" for her ideas, is exploding myths about the confinement of acceptable female roles to the domestic realm. And if, as Richard Hornby convincingly argues, "a play operates within a system of drama as a whole, and concentrically, also within the systems that form culture as a whole," then it is logical that a given society's drama not only reflects that particular culture, it also provides "a 'vocabulary' for describing it, or a 'geometry' for measuring it."[21] The growth of feminist drama clearly suggests a number of feminist playwrights have "measured" their society and found it lacking; through their plays, they create a new dramatic vocabulary, alternate social geometry, which casts into question traditional forms, patriarchal precepts or sexist shibboleths in the hope that audiences will reshape their own attitudes. However, when thinking about Hornby's postulation of a "drama/culture complex," in terms of feminist theatre, one must push the idea one step further: as well as being embedded in a societal cultural context, each playwright writes out of a personal culture, which reflects her "world view," to use a phrase dear to humanist critics. Feminism recognizes that one of the inescapable forces affecting a woman writer, in addition to the perceptions and knowledge her culture inscribes upon her, is the way she *sees that external world seeing her*. In other words, even as she is resisting them, the patriarchal influences she has absorbed shape her ideas and emotions about the world around her while simultaneously affecting her own self-concept. This complex, multi-layered interiorized 'culture' is the true creative site from which the playwright will -- if she feels free to write honestly -- draw her characters and ideas.

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[20] Hart, "Performing Feminism" in Making a Spectacle, p. 2.

[21] Richard Hornby, Drama, Metadrama, and Perception (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 22.

Since men's and women's experiences within their cultures may differ greatly, it is no wonder their staged representations of that culture diverge as well. In her 1984 book on "feminism, semiotics and cinema," *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis makes a similar point. She writes:

> Represented as the negative term of sexual differentiation, spectacle-fetish or specular image, in any case ob-scene, woman is constituted as the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man. But as historical individual, the female viewer is also positioned in the films of classical cinema as spectator-subject; she is thus doubly bound to that very representation which calls on her directly, engages her

> desire, elicits her pleasure, frames her identification, and makes her complicit in the production of (her) woman-ness. On this crucial relation of woman as constituted in representation to women as historical subjects depend at once the development of a feminist critique and the possibility of a materialist, semiotic theory of culture. For the feminist critique is a critique of culture at once from within and from without, in the same way in which women are both in the cinema as representation and outside the cinema as subjects of practices.[22]

A similar point about differences between the male and female viewpoint, in terms of language usage, is made by American sociolinguist Deborah Tannen, who has studied conversational styles between men and women and found them to differ -- although within society, "the male is seen as normative, the female as departing from the norm."[23] Of further interest to a study of feminist drama is Tannen's contention that, due to social conditioning which has led to different conversational styles, "women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence"(42). This difference, she says, means communication between men and women is akin to cross-cultural communication. Boys and girls, Tannen argues, even though they grow up in the same families, "grow up in different worlds" in which:

> Boys tend to play outside, in large groups that are hierarchically structured. Their groups have a leader who tells others what to

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[22] Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 15.

[23] Deborah Tannen, You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), p. 15.

> do and how to do it, and resists doing what other boys propose. It is by giving orders and making them stick that high status is imposed. (43)

One cannot help noting that this dominant boy's role sounds much like that of the director in a traditionally orchestrated play. In girls' games, Tannen says, play is conducted in small groups or in pairs:

> Within the group, intimacy is key . . . . Girls don't give orders; they express their preferences as suggestions, and suggestions are likely to be accepted (44).

The give-and-take of girls' play seems akin to the collaboration at the heart of collective theatre productions, an approach favored by several Canadian feminist theatre groups.

In order to explore women's opportunities for freedom, playwrights often delineate society's current constraints upon them. It is therefore a mistake to assume that feminist drama must present only happy stories about strong, successful women's behavior or achievements. Nor need it reify women's experience or idealize female characters. In her 1981 book, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics, Michelene Wandor delineates three features of feminist theatre: the breaking of sexual and body taboos; the importance of friendship and women's solidarity; and the reassessment of history from a woman's point of view.[24] Nor is feminist drama necessarily prescriptive; quite the contrary, often its intent is to suggest alternatives.

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[24] Michelene Wandor, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics (London: Methuen, 1981).

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Just as feminist philosophy is not homogenous, neither is feminist drama marked by a sameness which renders it readily identifiable. As Wandor puts it:

> . . . just because a play is by a woman, or includes women characters, or has an all-female cast, it does not necessarily mean that the play will be sympathetic to feminism, even though it may be about emotions and actions which are not commonly seen on the stage. Because a play is about women does not necessarily mean that it is about feminism; and if it is, it is important to try to understand how it refracts its feminist influences. (131)

In short, a female playwright does not guarantee a feminist play. The obvious question next arising is, can male playwrights create feminist plays? Wandor answers the question thus:

> . . . not all women are necessarily feminists . . . though all feminists must necessarily be women. Men cannot be feminists, although they can, and importantly should, be encouraged (challenged) to support feminism, participate in the struggle versus sexism in a variety of ways, and change themselves in the process. The chief reason why it is wrong to define anti-sexist men as feminists is because of the self-determination component in the consciousness and practice of women; to become self-determining for a woman means taking some kind of action against an identity of the so-called inferior sex. Men do not receive such conditioning . . . they may, of course, be dissatisfied with their own 'conditioned,' 'masculine' identity, but their response to that will be on the basis of gendered experience as men who refuse an image of macho superiority, not of the gendered experience of women who refuse an identity of inferiority. (132)

Obviously, then, according to Wandor, getting a "woman's education" is not enough to make a male playwright into a feminist playwright. Male critic Robert Wallace would seem to agree with Wandor; in his astute preface to his book Producing Marginality: Theatre and Criticism in Canada, Wallace pays tribute to feminist theoreticians who have greatly -- and, he implies positively -- affected his thinking, adding that he accepts their questioning of "universal" values. However, he notes that:

> as a man, I am irrevocably implicated in the patriarchal system that [feminist thinkers] actively work to subvert.[24]

Wallace appears to believe that since he was born 'male,' the power balance in society has worked in his favor. It is interesting to note that Wallace's position as a homosexual critic has not prevented his "implication."

Helene Keyssar maintains that feminist drama is clearly identifiable:

> While not all feminist dramas are overtly concerned with power and politics, taken together these plays present an overwhelming argument for the inseparability of sexuality and gender from politics. Equally important, many of these plays exploit the very nature of theatre to demonstrate the distinction between gender and sexuality. It is not in biologically defined sexual identity but in social gender roles that power is allocated and enacted on stage. (3)

Keyssar suggests that what marks feminist plays is "the strategy of transformation" their authors employ. Unlike traditional drama for the past two thousand years, she writes, feminist drama "does not rely on a recognition scene as the pivot of its structure" (xiv). Instead, in feminist drama:

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[24] Robert Wallace, Producing Marginality: Theatre and Criticism in Canada (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1990), p. 11.

> . . . the impetus is not towards self-recognition and revelation of a "true" self but towards recognition of others and a concomitant transformation of the self and the world. The female characters who are at the centre of feminist drama change in front of our eyes, sometimes gradually and sometimes suddenly. (xiv)

Although the transformative emphasis does not create heroic characters or presuppose a unified world inhabited by stable selves, Keyssar says, its presence in feminist drama "enriches and clarifies the feminist slogan 'the personal is political'" (xiv). As a result, she says, the focus of feminist playwrights is often private rather than public, the vision is often interior rather than exterior (xiii). Further, she says, characters in feminist plays "only rarely transcend their contexts; more frequently, they grapple with and attempt to reorder the ordinary activities of everyday life" (2). Because of their refusal to assume "heroic" trappings, Keyssar thinks feminist drama tends to be intimate and accessible:

> . . . one radical gesture of feminist theatre is to decrease the distance between playwright and actress, actress and character, to build without distortion or protection the stories told on stage from the experiences of those who make theatre. Theatrical and personal vulnerability are thus asserted rather than hidden. (4)

By emphasising vulnerability, feminist drama works to break down the "fourth wall" between audience and actors and seeks to implicate spectators in a personal relationship with the staged events.

The growth of feminist drama clearly deserves more attention than it has received to date in the history of the development of Canadian theatre. Within the past decade, a sizable body of distinctly feminist drama by English-Canadian playwrights has become identifiable to those with the will to seek it. Even though critic Robert Wallace notes with regret the average Canadian's lack of knowledge about the nation's theatre, he contends that "the marginal positioning of theatre within Canadian culture. . . can be resisted and, eventually overcome" (29) But, as academic Ronald Bryden observes, a printed "dramatic repertoire" has been a long time coming in Canada. In 1986, Bryden wrote:

> Riddle: what cannot live in a book, yet dies unless put in one? Answer: drama. A play is not a play until performed, but no nation can claim to possess a drama until it can point to a repertoire in print. Canada is a case in point. Since 1945, a vigorous Canadian theatre has grown up, staging some striking plays by considerable dramatists. But a Canadian repertoire? Few Canadian plays achieve revival, for few have achieved a life between covers. Small runs of individual plays sell in specialized bookstores in major cities. Professors buy them to teach university courses. But collections, the materials for considering Canadian drama in aggregate, for building a canon, have been lacking. Critics could not perform their Arnoldian function: they could not see drama clearly, for they could not see it whole.[25]

However, in 1991, when one regards the three anthologies of plays Bryden's review was evaluating, the "wholeness" of the drama depicted therein is questionable: Richard Perkyns's Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-84 contains 12 plays, only four of which are by women playwrights; women wrote only two of the 13 plays Jerry Wasserman included in his Modern Canadian Plays and only three of the 12 dramas in Richard Plant's version of Modern Canadian Drama are by women. Furthermore, in Wasserman's 1990 anthology, Twenty Years at Play: A New Play Centre Anthology, two of eight plays are by women.[26] In fact, there were several collections of drama by women published in the seventies and early eighties which Bryden does not mention, a point which renders selective his very complaint about the selectivity of Canadian drama anthologies.[27] In their 1990 book, drama professors Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much note that out of the 38 playwrights presented in Geraldine Anthony's Stage Voices and later in Robert Wallace's and Cynthia Zimmerman's The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights, "only five are female."[28] Although these statistics do not prove a conspiracy of exclusion by male-oriented editors, sheer numbers suggest the male viewpoint certainly outweighs the female in Canadian drama anthologies at a time when dynamic plays by women are consistently "making the scene" on the nation's stages. And even if publication is not the goal of a feminist playwright who distrusts the dictatorship of a fixed text, without it she will never have the ear of a broad theatre audience nor be likely to have her ideas become accessible to drama students.

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[25] Ronald Bryden, a review of Richard Perkyns, ed. Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-84; Richard Plant, ed. The Penguin Book of Modern Drama; Jerry Wasserman, ed. Modern Canadian Plays in Essays on Theatre 5, (November 1986), 81.

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[26] Jerry Wasserman, ed., Twenty Years at Play: A New Play Centre Anthology (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990).

[27] Some of the works Bryden does not mention in his article include: Beverley Simons, Preparing (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975) which contains five plays; Diane Bessai, ed., Prairie Performance (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1980), a collection of eight plays which includes three women playwrights; Enid Delgatty Rutland, ed., The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1982) and Margaret Hollingsworth, Willful Acts (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1985).

[28] Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much, Fair Play: 12 women speak (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1990), p. 9.

Fortunately, times do change, as Wasserman's introduction to Twenty Years at Play indicates. The New Play Centre, for which a woman, Pam Hawthorn, was managing director from 1972 until 1989, did make several moves to encourage women playwrights and directors: the centre's first production was Sharon Pollock's first play, A Compulsory Option. Furthermore, as Wasserman reports:

> To increase its commitment to women writers -- never sufficiently represented by New Play Centre productions even to this day -- the company mounted the 1975 "Ms. en Scene" competition. Winning playwrights included Cam Hubert (Anne Cameron), and the all-female production team featured directors Hawthorn, Svetlana Zylin and Kathryn Shaw. Hawthorn and Shaw, along with Jane Heyman . . . and later Kathleen Weiss, would be the most frequent directors of . . . shows over the next decade. . . . . [1985] also saw the first new competition for women writers in a decade: five "Women's Short Takes" were given four performances, two of them at midnight. (11)

In 1987, NeWest Press of Edmonton published NeWest Plays by Women, an anthology containing work by four women playwrights: Sharon Pollock, Joanna M. Glass, Wendy Lill and Pamela Boyd. Co-editor (with Don Kerr of Saskatoon) Diane Bessai, an English professor at the University of Alberta, describes the anthology as "the first regional collection of its kind," calling its publication "a natural reflection of the increasing prominence of women playwrights in the Canadian theatre of the 1980s."[29]

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A survey of the past 30 years indicates that drama as a whole, not just feminist drama, too often has lacked the broad base of fervent public support which has given, for instance, a sport such as hockey its high profile within the nation's cultural makeup. In fact, Canadian drama sometimes seems to lack even academic support. In 1986, playwright Brian Wade conducted a "personal survey" which suggested to him an imbalance:

> I started noticing that for every one Canadian drama course in an English department, there are at least one or two Canadian fiction or poetry courses being offered. And then I noticed that even when there are no Canadian drama courses offered, there are always fiction and poetry courses. The same thing is happening in the writing courses.[30]

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[29] Diane Bessai and Don Kerr, editors, NeWest Plays by Women (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1987), p. vii.

[30] Brian Wade, "Down and Out in the Can Lit Ghetto," Canadian Theatre Review 46 (Spring 1986), 106. Wade concluded that "Of the 39 universities surveyed, 15 (38 per cent) of English Departments offered no Canadian Drama courses whatever. . . . If you add up all the Canadian literature courses offered for the current year, the total comes to 148 courses. Thirty of these courses (20 per cent) offer some Canadian drama . . . . only seven per cent of all Canadian literature courses are devoted entirely to the study of Canadian drama while 27 per cent of courses are devoted entirely to Canadian fiction." Further, he noted that 19 (43 per cent) of the 39 universities surveyed offered no playwriting courses at all -- a figure which includes theatre departments. In terms of drama offerings, Wade concluded the "good guys" among Canadian universities included the universities of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Victoria and Concordia University in Montreal. The "bad guys" included McGill, Queens, Trent, Dalhousie, the University of Manitoba, Simon Fraser University and St. George's

The situation Wade chronicled, in which Canadian drama is the "poor cousin" in both English and drama departments, means two things: many students will not be taught an appreciation of existing national plays and few new playwrights will be encouraged through creative writing or playwriting courses.

In their book English-Canadian Theatre, professors Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly note that the first dramas in Canada were performed in Inuit and Indian cultures with shamanistic ritual dances and spirit-plays.[31] European drama, Benson and Conolly suggest, may have arrived in what is now Newfoundland as early as 1538. Alas for potential colonial actresses, the dramatic prejudices of the old world came ashore with the land's earliest settlers: when, in 1788, Sheridan's The School for Scandal was performed, "the female parts [were] played by two young Halifax boys" (3). As to Canada's first feminist playwright, she is generally conceded to be Torontonian Sarah Anne Curzon, leader of the nation's first women's rights group.[32] Curzon is remembered for two plays, Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812 (1887) and The Sweet Girl Graduate (1882), which promoted university education for women by making fun of those (primarily men, of course) who opposed such a progressive move.

College at the University of Toronto. Clearly, the bad guys are more numerous.

[31] Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, English Canadian Theatre (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 2.

[32] Louise H. Forsythe, "Feminist Theatre" in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, edited by Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 203-204.

In fact, when considered in light of Canada's colonial past, the slow germination of an identifiable body of English-Canadian feminist drama should not be surprising. As Canada was struggling to extricate itself from its status as a British colony (all the while feeling inferior to the United States), English-Canadian women bore an additional yoke of colonization: they were secondary citizens within the mainstream of male-oriented culture, not even legally considered "persons" until 1919. In the nineteenth century, English Canadian theatre was dominated by melodramas and comedies, produced by foreign companies, starring foreign actors. Although some home-grown Canadian actors were able to make a living during the first thirty or forty years of the twentieth century, they seldom performed in indigenous dramas. Jerry Wasserman writes that, "as late as 1945 there were no Canadian professional theatre companies."[33] Benson and Conolly cite the development of the Little Theatre movement as a vital step in stimulating the development of genuinely Canadian theatre. For instance, Toronto's Hart House, opened in 1919 under director Roy Mitchell, was constituted as a "place to nurture and challenge Canadian directors, designers, actors, technicians, playwrights and audiences" (46).

The next important development was the establishment of the

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[33] Jerry Wasserman, ed., Modern Canadian Plays (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985), p. 9. Wasserman claims that, "Canadian theatre as an indigenous professional institution dates only as far back as the end of World War II. And English-Canadian drama, in the sense of a body of dramatic work by Canadian playwrights written for performance in professional theatres, is a more recent development still. Modern drama in Quebec had its inception with Gratien Gelinas's Tit-Coq in 1948. For English Canada the key date was 1967 . . . ."

Dominion Drama Festival in 1933 to "co-ordinate the activities of Canada's many Little Theatres in an attempt to give them a sense of national identity and purpose" (50). However, as Betty Lee's Love and Whisky: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival intimates, despite the organizers' avowed goal to "develop a national drama and consequently original Canadian plays will be encouraged," theatre's "old-boy network" remained firmly in command of standards and adjudication, usually preferring such "standard festival fare" as William Wycherley's The Country Wife or Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit to homegrown dramas.[34] Still, there were Canadian women playwrights creating socially conscious plays in the 1930s. For instance, at the first Dominion Drama Festival in April 1933, Lillian Beynon Thomas's Jim Barber's Spite Fence was among the first three opening-night plays. And alongside the largely socially correct, conservative theatre usually rewarded by the festival, there developed a body of leftist political theatre in which women were active. Toronto's Workers' Experimental Theatre, for instance, used unemployed actors to perform political works, such as Dorothy Livesay's Joe Derry (1933), which explicated social ills and analysed economic situations and class structures. The most memorable political play of this era is Eight Men Speak, co-written by three men (Oscar Ryan, Frank Love, Edward Cecil-Smith) and one woman, Mildred Goldberg. The play, which is based on the trial and imprisonment of eight Canadian communists, challenged the bourgeoise conventions of Canadian theatre of the era by using the anti-illusionist strategies of Bertolt Brecht. In fact, so inflammatory did the play seem when it was presented on Dec. 5, 1933 that a second performance was prevented by police action, and the play was not seen again on stage until 1982 (Benson and Conolly, 59).

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[34] Betty Lee, Love and Whisky: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), p.96.

The problem was that many Dominion Drama Festival officials seemed to believe the term "Canadian drama" to be an oxymoron, if not an impossible chimera. In 1949, The Toronto Telegram noted that "only ten Canadian plays were entered" in all the regional festivals across the land, of which Elsie Park Gowan's Breeches From Bond Street was considered among the five best by regional adjudicator Robert Speaight (Lee, 293). In 1956, Patricia Joudry's Teach Me How To Cry actually managed to win the top trophy at festival finals in Sherbrooke. And voices continued to call for indigenous drama: in the 1950s, critic Herbert Whittaker was "plugging hard for an all-Canadian play festival" (294). Finally, in 1960, Dominion Drama Festival policy makers agreed that Canadian plays should be featured exclusively at the 1967 centennial-year finals. As it turned out, amateur companies presented 62 Canadian plays in the DDF competitions, of which 29 were premières, but not one of the six full-length plays to reach the finals was written by a woman. Nor did an "all-Canadian" festival continue the following year. Perhaps the same fate befell such an idea as that of 1964 report generated by a Dominion Drama Festival "Committee of the Future":

> It recommended, among other things, that the DDF become a multi-bodied, single-headed organization, working in the fields of Canadian playwriting, professional theatre, community theatre and educational theatre. It created a flurry at the Charlottetown get-together, then settled with a gentle thud. (305)

Also vital to the development of national theatre was the founding of The Banff School of the Theatre (renamed in 1936 as The Banff School of Fine Arts) by E.A. Corbett and Elizabeth Sterling Haynes in 1933. Theatre historian Moira Day describes the school's co-founders as "fervent cultural missionaries," and writes that Haynes "had been influenced by the mystical strain in the Little Theatre movement."[35] Dedicated to the idea of a "people's theatre," Haynes successfully encouraged indigenous playwrights and grassroots drama. In 1935, Relief, a Depression farm tragedy written by a Saskatchewan housewife named Minnie Bicknell, was workshopped and presented at the school; in 1937 it won a place at the Dominion Drama Festival where its creator and her real-life husband starred in the folk play depicting Martha and John Weatherby's double burden of debt and drought. It is interesting to note that when the Banff school brought in North Carolina director Frederick Koch to further organize a folk-playwrighting program, women rose to the occasion. As Moira Day notes, three of the four plays written "under Koch's tutelage in 1937" were by women: Elsie MacCleave's Thunderbird; Jessie M. Robertson's Rolling Logs; and

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[35] Moira Day, "The Banff School of Fine Arts 1933-1969: A Theatre of the People," in Alberta 2 (Spring 1989), 49.

Mary Ellen Burgess's On to Ottawa (51).

Perhaps no early English-Canadian woman dramatist wrote as consistently or as productively as Gwen Pharis Ringwood (1910-1984), a prolific American-born playwright who moved to Alberta with her family when she was three years old. In 1936, her children's play The Dragons of Kent premièred at the Banff School where Ringwood worked as a secretary. Her early play, Still Stands The House, first performed in 1938, explored the prairie-farm experience which has marked the psyches of so many Canadians. Two of the play's three characters are women, and at the heart of the drama is a struggle between the farm daughter, Hester, and her brother's wife, Ruth, for possession of the family land. A Rockefeller Foundation scholarship enabled Ringwood to study at the Carolina Playmakers' School from 1937 to 1939. Ringwood wrote plays that were obviously western Canadian, and which often dared to have at their centres both female and native characters. The late Margaret Laurence wrote of the delight she felt in 1945 upon seeing a production of Ringwood's Dark Harvest (which had premièred in 1939) at the University of Manitoba. She recalls it as:

> . . . the first Canadian play I had ever seen, and furthermore it was set in the prairies during the drought and depression, my own land and the time of my own growing up.[36]

An earlier one-act version of Dark Harvest, called Pasque Flower, had been naive and over-written. Noting the difference between the

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[36] Margaret Laurence, "Foreword," The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, ed., Enid Delgatty Rutland (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1982), xi.

"suffering but essentially passive Lisa," in the initial play and her later namesake, "the strong, intelligent sexual being . . . unwilling to live all her life in . . . limbo," Laurence remarks how difficult it must have been for writers of Ringwood's era to portray women as they "knew they were, not as they had been presented by generations of male writers" (xii). However, Ringwood sometimes found it difficult to escape cultural conditioning, as her 1942 one-act play, The Courting of Marie Jenvrin reveals. Best described as a truncated, Northwest Territories version of The Taming of the Shrew, the play focuses on a high-spirited French-Canadian named Marie, who is spanked into submission by a sturdy Irish miner named Michael Lorrigan! According to critic Ann Saddlemyer, a year before her death Ringwood confessed her embarrassment at the "unthinking male chauvinism" of that early play.[37]

English-Canadian drama in the 1940s and 1950s did provide a few theatre opportunities for English-Canadian women: Elizabeth Sterling Haynes was co-founder of the theatre program at The Banff School of Fine Arts; Dora Mavor Moore founded the New Play Society in Toronto; directors such as Marigold Charlesworth and Jean Roberts, along with actresses such as Frances Hyland, Jackie Burroughs, Kate Reid, Martha Henry and Charmion King, found work at Toronto's Crest Theatre, which operated from 1954 to 1966 with the avowed intention of "providing opportunities for the development of

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[37] Ann Saddlemyer, "Circus Feminus: 100 plays by English-Canadian Women," in Room of One's Own (Volume 8, No. 2), 1982. pp. 78-91.

Canadian artists." However, it was not until the mid-sixties, as Canadian theatre became caught up in collaborative and improvisational methods, which challenged existing conservative views about what subjects were worthy of becoming "drama," that women playwrights began to emerge as forceful stage voices.[38]

Jerry Wasserman notes that 1967 was "the year that English-Canadian drama began to achieve legitimacy" (9). He cites the success of five "new plays given professional productions literally from coast to coast as part of the Centennial celebrations" -- one of which, a play about the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, was written by a woman, Ann Henry.[39] Although the establishment in 1953 of the Stratford Festival did "raise the profile of theatre in Canada" and provide an actors' training ground, the Stratford project "did little to effect or support the development of Canadian playwriting" (Wasserman, 12-13). Nor did the presence of Stratford do anything to bring Canadian drama to the "hinterlands" on either side of Ontario. However, with the founding in 1958 of the Manitoba Theatre Centre, it seemed possible that indigenous drama might flourish in a "Canadian national theatre that would be decentralized and regional, like the nation itself" (13). Canada Council support led to the opening, from 1963 to 1970, of eight more regional theatres in Vancouver, Halifax, Edmonton, Regina, Montreal, Calgary, Fredericton and Toronto.

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[38] The "rise of radio" in Canada in the 1930s and '40s also gave many playwrights, including women such as Gwen Pharis Ringwood and Elsie Park Gowan, their chance to be heard nationally. The drawback of radio drama, however, was that the plays were heard once, then seldom again available in either tape or script format to the general public.

[39] Ann Henry, Lulu Street (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975). This play offers a bleak, uncompromising look at the lives of 11 characters living on Lulu Street, in Matthew Alexander's shabby house in Winnipeg. Alexander is a strike leader, an "important man," but he is out of touch with the needs of his young daughter Elly. The women in the play are portrayed as passive victims (Elly), competent homemakers (Mrs. One) or good-time girls (Sadie), but the business of politics and social change is left to the men -- even if they are defeated by economic ills beyond their control.

But, alas, Canadian playwrights frequently failed to find safe harbours in regional theatres. Instead, they encountered largely conservative managers eager to lure their public with tried-and-true productions. Jerry Wasserman cites a 1971 survey by Maclean's magazine which found that in 1970 seven major regional theatres had produced the work of only two Canadian dramatists, "and had paid them less than $5,000 out of combined budgets of more than $2 million" (14). Wasserman rightly notes:

> With few exceptions the regionals served up homogenized theatre: safe, commercial seasons of British and American hits plus a smattering of world classics. Moreover, it was theatre as Cultural Event, like the opera or the symphony, the kind of thing you got dressed up for. (15)

In short, time was ripe for yet another form of Canadian theatre: alternate theatre. In fact, as early as 1959, George Luscombe had co-founded Toronto Workshop Productions, based on Joan Littlewood's experiments with left-wing politics, improvisation, collective scripting and documentary theatre in England. In the late sixties and early seventies, Luscombe produced plays to challenge his audience's political and social assumptions. And in 1968 Jim Garrard founded Theatre Passe Muraille, which "under Paul

Thompson's stewardship . . . became the most important theatre in Canada in the early seventies" as it told local stories on a shoestring and made docudrama its trademark (16). Soon the dynamic example presented by Passe Muraille spawned other small, local theatres determined to reach their own audiences: Saskatchewan's Twenty-Fifth Street House Theatre (1971); Newfoundland's CODCO (ironically, founded in Toronto in 1973 by six Newfoundland actors); Theatre 3 (1970) Alberta Theatre Projects (1972) in Alberta; Pier One (1970) in Nova Scotia; and The Mummers Troupe (1972) in Newfoundland. And from 1972 to 1982, Festival Lennoxville in Quebec presented all-Canadian summer seasons, including works by such women playwrights as Sharon Pollock and Betty Lambert. In 1971, a group of University of British Columbia theatre graduates (including John Gray) formed the collective Tamahnous Theatre, which gave Vancouver audiences their first taste of consistently innovative, progressive plays. Alternate theatre companies, with their 1960s liberationist disdain for the predictable, their flexible approach to staging and their focus on Canadian stories, paved the way for the growth of feminist drama. Collective creation frequently resulted in plays which were episodic, non-linear, open-ended, and challenged audiences to overcome the stage's "fourth wall" and write their own conclusions depending upon their own political involvement with the play itself. Alan Filewod notes that modern collective drama

> places the _responsibility_ for the play on the shoulders of the collective; instead of a governing mind providing an artistic vision which others work to express, the

> collectively created play is the vision of a supra-individualist mind.[40]

Provocative feminist playwrights such as Linda Griffiths, Anne-Marie MacDonald, and Monica Mojica were shaped by their early improvisational and collective theatre experiences.

Among individual women playwrights writing in the heady sixties, the most remarkable of the trendsetters was Beverley Simons, whose play Crabdance is as trenchant today as it was in 1969, when it was first produced in Seattle, Washington. Crabdance is without doubt English-Canada's earliest fully feminist play. Tragicomic, ritualistic, wonderfully innovative in its form, thoroughly challenging in its playful depiction of gender roles within North American society, Crabdance deserves to be everywhere lauded as a Canadian classic. Instead, it is little known outside of university drama classes and seldom produced commercially.

Following the 1972 Canadian première of Crabdance, other powerful women playwrights developed, as have avowed feminist companies, such as Redlight Productions in Toronto, which was founded in January, 1974, to present works by women writers about women's issues, and "to give women opportunities in the technical, artistic, and administrative aspects of theatre."[41] With Marcella Lustig and Francine Volker, Diane Grant was one of the three founders who established the company on a $31,000 Local Initiatives Project grant. Its first production in April, 1974, was Entrances, about actresses Eleanor Duse and Sarah Bernhardt; its second show was Grant's immensely popular What Glorious Times They Had, which toured both the Maritimes and Western Canada. Redlight also produced Margaret Hollingsworth's early play about lesbian love, Alli Alli Oh, and it developed its own scripts on such topics as rape, abortion, and the sexual stereotyping of women. In recent years, Redlight has been eclipsed by the increasingly strong and vibrant Toronto company, Nightwood Theatre, founded in 1978. And in Alberta, feminist production principles are pursued by Calgary's Maenad Productions, founded in 1987. Perhaps the best news of all for feminist theatre is the fact that innovative women playwrights now receive national recognition on a regular basis: Sharon Pollock won the first Governor General's award for drama in 1981 with Blood Relations, and took the prize again in 1986 with Doc; Judith Thompson is another two-time winner of the same award, in 1984 with White Biting Dog and in 1989 with The Other Side of the Dark; and Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), Ann-Marie MacDonald's unabashedly comedic feminist revision of Shakespeare's Othello and

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[40] Alan Filewod, "Collective Creation: Process, Politics and Poetics" in Canadian Theatre Review 34 (Spring 1982), 47. Filewod maintains that "a fundamental difference between the individual and collective playwrights is that the individual synthesizes the objective world into a private vision, whereas the collective synthesizes it into a public vision." For feminist playwrights, the collective is thus a useful vehicle with which to re-present women's issues and values hitherto dominated by values filtered through a male gaze.

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[41] History of Redlight Theatre, data from drama archives, Metropolitan Toronto Library. This unsigned statement of intent and objectives maintains, "We want to portray women as people whose existence in a play is not determined simply by their relationship, sexual or otherwise, to men. Women's culture is wider and deeper than that, particularly now with the exciting change in women's status."

Romeo and Juliet, won a Governor General's award in 1990.

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This thesis posits that there is at present no overall, single prototype for the "definitive" feminist play within English-Canadian drama, just as there is not at this time -- nor perhaps should there ever be -- a prescribed "canon" of feminist plays. For any critic to specify such an ideal play or to create such a body of "acceptable" feminist works would be to recreate exactly the same trap of reductionism and exclusivity that feminists decry in traditional (read male-dominated) theatre practice. However, this study surveys 29 works by English-Canadian playwrights and finds there are discernable commonalities in both content and intent, as well as in dramatic techniques, among works by playwrights interested in depicting feminist concerns on the nation's stages.

It must be noted that a critic's political stance affects her critical activity; thus personal politics often become most useful if overtly identified rather than covertly encoded within a critique. To do otherwise is to err in the paths of solipsism -- implying that the critic's political view is universally shared -- or of presumption -- concluding only one political stance exists and is always in place for everyone, no matter what the issue. I find myself most sympathetic to the analysis of society formulated by materialist-feminist philosophy, although I also admit that, had I undertaken this study a decade ago (as a younger and angrier woman), I would no doubt have spoken from the radical-feminist position, which I still favor on many points. Although I have located myself within the materialists' chamber at the feminist manor, I acknowlege the validity of other feminist philosophies when addressing dramatic or social complexities. In fact, I resist the idea of being locked within one particular feminist "room" if doing so means denying myself access to other viewpoints. Therefore, within this thesis I may draw upon ideas from more than one critical perspective. The readings of the plays discussed here are merely tentative mappings, not definitive last words. The individual plays under study are chosen for three reasons: the prominence of the playwright and availability of her scripts; the women-centred subject matter of the plays themselves; and the dramatic method the playwright choses for the enactment of her theme. In addition, and this may be disquieting to radical feminists, three works by male playwrights are discussed in order to illustrate how "intent" -- that is, writing woman-centred drama -- does not always translate into "content" from a feminist viewpoint. As a matter of organizational convenience, plays are grouped in chapters according to historical and/or thematic concerns -- divisions which might be considered arbitrary and subjective -- although the critiques themselves strive to move beyond simple chronological or thematic explication.

How then, do I propose to identify the various feminist plays analyzed herein? First, I would reiterate that "feminist" drama springs from a "gender-consciousness," to use Helene Keyssar's term, which within the play's text or subtext reveals understanding of feminist issues or politics. Frequently, this may mean that a play is peopled with female characters and demonstrates female solidarity, but it does not require banning male actors from the stage. After all, as Betty Lambert ably demonstrates in Under The Skin, a one-dimensional male villain may provide a foil for multi-dimensional female characters in a play where the shifting relationship between two women is the real site of the action.

Next, I would suggest that much, although not all, feminist drama evinces an indifference to or lack of dependence upon the traditional concept of plot and linear progression. Margaret Hollingsworth's play War Babies demonstrates, perhaps overly zealously, how toying with time and place can "defamiliarize" (that is, upset the expectations of) an audience and lead it to look at old assumptions about gender roles in new ways. Third, feminist playwrights tend to focus on "interior" or personal issues rather than "exterior" or public ones, although there are times when the protagonist's personal growth may demand the fusion of the two -- for instance, the maturation experienced by Francis Beynon in Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days. Fourth, this emphasis upon interiority means that strict adherence to realism or to "brute facts" is not always useful to the feminist playwright, so there may be elements of the surreal or dream world in feminist drama, as, for example, in a play such as Judith Thompson's White Biting Dog.

And finally, because autonomy -- that is, developing a staged "story" wherein a character comes to terms with the necessity of her own independence or self-actualization -- is a major theme of feminist drama, the idea of closed or fixed characterization is often absent from the playwright's vision, which in turn means no one tells the audience how or what to think about a character. I would not always posit, as does Keyssar, a required "transformative" aspect to feminist drama, but I do maintain that the chance for transformation is frequently vital to a feminist aesthetic within a play.

A vexing problem in a study such as this is the difficulty words themselves -- the power they carry within the printed playscript -- present to some feminist critics. As Ann Wilson points out in Canadian Theatre Review's special "Feminism & Canadian Theatre" issue, it is important that feminists assail the authority of logos.[42] Citing such theoreticians as Julia Kristeva and Laura Mulvey, Wilson argues that giving primacy to a script may effect a sort of "social prohibition" upon the "relations between people" established by theatrical performance; to put it bluntly, scripts can assume tyrannical force to thwart or dictate dramatic happenings. Further, Wilson writes:

> To be deemed feminist it is not enough that a script deal with issues of concern to women nor that it subvert the formal conventions of linearity and closure. To be deemed feminist, a production should be born of a politically conscious theatrical practice. (175)

As I indicated previously, this is exactly my position on the "ideal" of feminist drama. However, an obvious problem develops in a study such as this, where commentaries and critiques are drawn primarily from close readings of published (hence fixed) scripts rather than from live productions of plays. My solution to this undeniable dilemma is not entirely satisfactory: wherever feasible, I focus closely upon each playwright's stage directions, paying particular attention to the writer's intentions about the play's production. Nevertheless, much of my commentary also stems from the "words" within the play: characters' monologues and dialogues. When possible and relevant, a playwright's own analysis of particular plays or productions is included, as is pertinent information on a playwright's political views. In this fashion, I hope to provide as broad a critical matrix as possible, within which each play is viewed as a vibrant entity rather than as a stolid artifact of theatre history or a static representative of a particular critical position.

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[42] Ann Wilson, "Carte Blanche: The politics of the script,'' Canadian Theatre Review 43 (Summer 1985), 174-178.

The organizing principle pursued in this study is neither strictly historical nor rigidly thematic. Rather, it is a meld of the two: my primary interest is to show major English-Canadian feminist dramatists' emerging thematic concerns; a secondary goal is to comment upon some of the different theatrical means employed to "tell women's stories" on stage during the past 30 years.[42] My intent in this study is to prove that drama predicated upon women characters' exploration of concerns vital to them has developed far beyond a "marginal" interest. Nor does this focus upon women playwrights suggest that all plays by men are inherently sexist.

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[42] This discussion makes no claims to offer a complete theatre history nor is it an exhaustive roll call of woman-centred drama.

Instead, this study is an attempt to redress an imbalance in the serious critical attention paid to women playwrights and their works. Ultimately, it is my hope that this study reveals the number, strength and diversity of women's voices -- among playwrights and the characters they create -- within contemporary English-Canadian drama.

Chapter II

> "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text -- as into the world and into history -- by her own movement." --Hélène Cixous[43]

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Since the early 1960s, several English-Canadian playwrights have made a concerted effort to put women "into the text." Although the term "herstory," that is, history which includes and is told from women's perspective, has suffered from glib overuse and any number of bad jokes, the idea behind such a concept is certainly still valid. Furthermore, a number of plays with the aim of committing certain facts of women's history to the dramatic record, so to speak, have enjoyed lives of their own both as productions and as publications. The existence of such plays is both healthy and necessary to the development of Canadian drama, and an analysis of this body of work is essential to understanding where a discrete body of feminist drama might be seen to begin, and where it might be expected to end, if indeed it ends at all.

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[43] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," transl. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, Signs 1 (Summer 1976), 875-93.

This chapter gives close reading to six plays which take as their subjects either a specific woman in history or the role of particular women characters at a certain period in Canadian history. The time span of the writing covered is roughly a decade, from 1974 to 1983: What Glorious Times They Had, Red Emma, Waiting for the Parade, Maggie & Pierre, What Is To Be Done? and The Fighting Days. In analysing these half-dozen plays, one discovers varying commitments to the creation of theatre which can be called feminist; one finds that good intentions and female subjects do not always a feminist drama make. What is essential to feminist drama, it turns out, even before one talks about a play's content, is the pre-existence of a feminist awareness or analysis of society out of which the play is written. Without that political groundwork, even an "experimental" play on "women's issues" may end up being non-feminist; without that gender-conscious matrix, there can be no transformational possibilities for the women's stories unfolding on stage -- or on page. A consistent theme throughout the above six plays is the need for female characters to meld their inner/private awareness with an outer/public reality. Starting with What Glorious Times They Had, these plays show that women's empowerment cannot remain in the liberal-feminist realm of "consciousness raising" alone, but must be linked with deliberate action to effect change for women in general and the self in particular in the world at large. For instance, in What Glorious Times They Had, the female characters seek the vote as a means of garnering for their sex greater autonomy within their society. The natural outcome of such an impetus for autonomy culminates in The Fighting Days, when Francis Beynon finds that political awareness and personal growth are inexplicably joined, one augmenting the other.

One of the earliest contemporary woman playwrights to attempt to reclaim a niche of Canadian history -- that occupied by suffragist efforts to win the vote in pre-World War I Manitoba -- was actress, director and playwright Diane Grant, who worked with director George Luscombe at Toronto Workshop Productions and was involved with the now inactive Redlight Theatre in the 1970s. Perhaps the best measure of Grant's commitment as an early modern English-Canadian feminist playwright can be found in the indefatigable research she did prior to writing What Glorious Times They Had: Grant read all 13 of Nellie McClung's somewhat sententious novels, and she ploughed through vintage newspaper reports of McClung's activities as "a prominent campaigner in the successful drives for female suffrage in Manitoba and Alberta, a nationally known feminist and social reformer."[44] The result is a play which employs wit and music to dramatize the spirit and mission of the suffragist movement, as well as to satirize (and thus subvert) the entrenched male attitudes opposing greater autonomy for women.

When What Glorious Times They Had premièred in May 1974 at Toronto's Redlight Theatre, it brought to life a number of all-but-forgotten women from Canada's recent history: Nellie McClung, known to her detractors as "Windy Nellie" and "Calamity Nell," but revered by her followers as "Our Nellie"; the farm sisters turned activist-journalists, Lillian and Francis Beynon; and the redoubtable rural reporter, E. Cora Hind.[45] In "re-activating" the audience's awareness of such early Western-Canadian women activists, Grant and her collaborators not only functioned as animators of history, they also reminded women (feminist or not) of the 1970s that they were part of a continuum working to improve women's status, that they were not "ahistorical" but were part of a sorority for too long unacknowledged.

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[44] Veronica Strong-Boag, "An introduction," In times like these: Nellie McClung, edited by Michael Bliss (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), vii.

And, as befits both the time of the play's creation and the era of its setting, What Glorious Times They Had is an example of one of Canada's earliest feminist collaborative efforts. Grant "wrote a scenario of chronological events and worked with the cast, scene by scene, improvising and writing. The cast members conducted their own research into their characters and provided new material and ideas."[46] The result was a compact two-act play containing a total of 25 scenes, often enlivened by song, which capture both the pre-war politics and the temperance sentiments prevalent. Grant herself performed the part of Nellie and served as director when the play premièred. As the stage directions indicate, the first production of the play used techniques initiated by George Luscombe and Paul Thompson, then considered innovative in Canadian theatre.

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[45] Diane Grant and Company, What Glorious Times They Had (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1974).

[46] Diane Grant, What Glorious Times They Had, p. E3.

For instance, the actors were assigned more than one role:

> E. Cora Hind doubled as a factory woman, Adelaide, and Evelyn [an Eastern woman]. Lillian doubled as a factory woman and as Millicent [Evelyn's sister]. One actor played Sir Rodmond Roblin and all other male roles were taken by the second actor. An actor's change from one character to another was accomplished by a Brechtian technique using a change of hat, vest or veil. No attempt was made to disguise the actor, and sometimes the transformation was made onstage. (E4)

As well as saving on actors' salaries, an economy all too frequently necessary in alternate theatre productions, the doubling technique performs a more important political function within the play: as an actor moves between roles as a professional and a blue-collar worker, the audience is jarred out of its immersion in simple mimesis wherein art recreates life. Instead, what Bertolt Brecht called "alienation" (defamiliarization" in Formalist terms) occurs, and as mundane events or images are represented in a strange manner, the audience is forced to take note of the realities of class difference within a capitalist society.

The doubling among the female characters, if viewed from a materialist-feminist perspective, also makes a moral point that women of all classes must strive for solidarity in order to effect change; doubling implies all women may expect benefits from "this suffragist business," to use Premier Roblin's dismissive term. Theatre arts professor Janelle Reinelt has observed that British feminist dramatists employed Brecht's techniques in the 1970s in such plays as Strike While the Iron is Hot and Trafford Tanzi to achieve a "criticism of the received past from the standpoint of a concrete present."[47] In fact, in many of the staging techniques used in What Glorious Times They Had -- especially its break from prairie realism to use six intersecting lighted "circles" upon the stage to suggest changes of setting, its minimal use of props and its surreal re-creation using the actors' bodies and a few blocks and chains to suggest powerfully the machinery, noise and sweated labor of brute industry -- Grant's play is reminiscent of the methods of the Workers Experimental Theatre of the 1930s and also anticipates feminist theatre techniques of the 1980s.

The satirizing of received (patriarchal) wisdom within What Glorious Times They Had is especially evident in the stage direction which specifies that, "members of the Legislative Assembly and the Mock Parliament [be] represented by balloons which [are] used to suggest a large number of anonymous and obedient government backbenchers" (E4), and continues throughout the play. Such clever scenes as that in Act One identified as "The Ride To The Factory" operate successfully on two planes: on the physical level, the premier's jerky, inept driving of his shiny new Pierce Arrow is contrasted with Nellie and Francis's deadpan decorum as "proper" and passive lady passengers; Nellie's thrice-repeated phrase, "Not at all," can be read as subtext: a feminist commentary (wonderfully subversive because so polite) upon the erroneously presumed correctness of the "established order" of things which

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[47] Janelle Reinelt, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama," Theatre Journal 38 (May 1986), 154-163.

Roblin represents. On the political level, Roblin seems to see no incongruity between word and deed as he lectures his passengers on "new-fangled gadgets" -- all the while proudly driving one! And, of course, astute audience members will find yet a third level within the scene, drawn from social history, wherein the past intersects with the present in the form of an unspoken extra-textual standing joke: conventional "wisdom" holds that women are terrible drivers, but here is a male leader of a government functioning abominably in the driver's seat himself.

What Glorious Times They Had is essentially a "problem play," although that fact is obscured by its lively theatricality and witty dialogue. The opening two lines state the issue succinctly:

> Roblin: No woman, idiot, lunatic or criminal shall vote.
> Fletcher: Elections Act, Dominion of Canada. (E7)

And over the four years (1912 through 1916) spanned by the play's events, the "problem" is solved by the vigorous, intelligent action of the women of the Winnipeg Political Equality League. Although the first statement of the play goes to the men, women, as represented by Nellie, have the last word: "Never retract, never explain. Get the thing done and let them howl."[48] Along the way, a series of scenes illuminating the depth and breadth of the problem -- women's status as dependents deemed lacking the

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[48] Michael Bliss, ed., In Times Like These, p. vii. In fact, Veronica Strong-Boag cites Nellie McClung's full campaign slogan as, "Never retract, never explain, never apologize -- get the thing done and let them howl."

"intelligence" to vote -- is interspersed with other scenes which propel the plot forward. In its construction, What Glorious Times They Had functions as effective agit-prop: it illustrates the problem succinctly, it does not lecture or hector the audience, and it moves quickly and wittily towards the desired resolution.

One of the most delightful aspects of the script is the way it simply and humorously posits complex philosophies about the nature of women without resorting to alienating jargon or deadening speechifying. For instance, the explication of the patriarchal view of Woman as Other occurs in the second scene of the play when the Tory premier, Sir Rodmond Roblin, confides his domestic woes to his parliamentary secretary, P.T. Fletcher, as the pair feeds pigeons in the park. It seems even Roblin's wife is a Political Equality League sympathizer, a fact which greatly annoys the premier. Fletcher notes that the Liberal leader Tobias Norris thinks the suffragists are right, and Roblin responds irritably:

> Roblin: Right? Of course, they're not right. The man'~~s a~~ bachelor. What does he know? "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." That's damn well right. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church." Paul to the Ephesians, Chapter 5, Verse 22.

As a man of his era, Roblin finds the suffragists' ideas a clear threat to the "natural" order of things as spelled out in scripture. A man who believes established authority and hierarchical structures are essential to a well-functioning society, Roblin looks upon suffragists' challenges to ordered hierarchy within families -- the backbone of society -- just as he would regard an anarchist wishing to overthrow the carefully ensconced laws of state: his sense of distaste and alarm are exceeded only by his staunch belief that such thinking is wrong and misguided. Fletcher, on the other hand, relies upon more prosaic observations to buttress his beliefs about women's unsuitability for the vote. For instance, in a remark reminiscent of the Victorian interest in phrenology, the "science" which maintained the size and shape of the cranium was the clue to a person's mental and moral faculties, Fletcher observes:

> You know, their heads are smaller. Their brains are probably smaller, too. Do you think they're smart enough to vote? (E12)

With the deliciously ironic timing characteristic of the play, Nellie McClung strolls by at just this moment, bids the bird-feeding Tories a civil "good day," then exits. The two men watch her go, and Roblin responds ruminatively: "You know, Fletcher, I believe you're right. Their heads are smaller." This vignette perfectly illustrates the prevailing notion of Woman as an Alien, Lesser Creature -- while simultaneously poking fun at those who judge her to be so.

But while depicting the injustices afflicting women -- such as insurance policies which reward them only upon death since their "hysterical" natures might induce them to claim feigned or imagined injuries; a section in The Married Woman's Protection Act which allows women to apply for court protection only if they have not committed adultery -- What Glorious Times They Had also celebrates women's competence. For instance, Francis Beynon, as editor of the women's page at the Grain Grower's Guide, is importuned to run recipes by a brash chap named Al, who represents Purity Flour. Francis completely flummoxes him, and the scene ends with a gender-role turnabout: he sings praises to a recipe for "orange torte" in which "the secret's in the flour." (E14). Even funnier is a scene in which the feisty Cora Hind briskly discusses the vagaries of improperly functioning bulls' testicles with a bluff rancher from Calgary.

Grant and company even manage to make a point about the status quo in Canadian theatre in the introduction of the Political Equality League's staging of the Women's Parliament skit. When Cora approaches Mr. Walker about booking the theatre and tells him the women want to put on a play they wrote themselves, he asks in amazement, "A Canadian play?" (E44). By incorporating the Mock Parliament sketch within the play, its creators take What Glorious Times They Had into the realm of metadrama, wherein a critical blending of art and life creates a play within a play which reflects upon the human condition. In so doing, the play is able to comment upon the status quo of the era it recreates while simultaneously suggesting an alternative. The "stage is set" for metadrama when Nellie addresses the legislative committee on behalf of the Political Equality League. Nellie's first words are bound to ring a bell with a literate theatre audience:

> We are not here to ask for mercy but for justice. Do we not have brains to think, hands to work, hearts to feel and lives to live? Do we not bear our part in citizenship? Do we not help to build the empire? (E45)

Nellie speaks in a measured cadence reminiscent of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice (III, i) when Shylock says, "I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions." The choice of rhetoric here adds dignity to McClung's words, and juxtaposes one form of Other (early-20th century woman) with another Other (Shakespeare's rendition of a reviled Venetian Jew in his 1596 play). The conflation of the implications of early-twentieth-century sexism with those of Elizabethan racism blends within the play historical awareness of injustice with contemporary political consciousness. And the literary reference echoes again in the Walker Theatre when the representative of the Franchise for Fellows Society makes his appeal to the women's parliament:

> We bring home the bacon, may we not cook it?
> We lie in the beds, may we not make them?
> We have one less rib, why not one more privilege?
> We have the brains, why not the vote? (E52)

The use of such cross- and inter-textual reference qualifies What Glorious Times They Had as an effective parody, according to the critical terms of Richard Hornby, who sees a potent political function in such plays:

> In parodying the received dramatic tradition, the serious playwright is attacking and ultimately altering the means by which people think, behave, and decide . . . . The serious artist's function in a dynamic society becomes radical, not to reaffirm the social order but to hold it up for examination and -- if his new vision catches on, as Brecht's did -- to

alter it.[49]

In fact, according to Hornby's criteria, What Glorious Times They Had includes four varieties of metadrama: it contains a play within a play; it requires that characters enact others' roles; it makes use of literary references and it is self-referential.[50] Furthermore, as the play records a past era for a progressive audience, its goal remains to educate its beholders, to present the past as an explanation of the way we were (or even still are), thus illustrating what vestiges of thought or policy from that past we may still need to jettison or change.

Quite the best part of What Glorious Times They Had is, of course, the parliamentary burlesque wherein the posturings of the Tory "good ol' boys" appear ridiculous when mouthed by the women. The play's self-reflexive use of parody climaxes as Nellie, aping the Premier, responds to the Fellow for Franchise, echoing in patronizing tone and self-serving logic the answer Roblin gave her request for women's franchise. A juxtaposition of the two illustrates how the play nicely skewers all assumptions based on gender:

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[49] Richard Hornby, Drama, Metadram, and Perception (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1986), pp. 25-6.

[50] Richard Hornby, Drama, Metadrama, and Perception, p. 32. Hornby defines metadrama as "drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself . . . . all drama is metadramatic, since its subject is always, willy-nilly, the drama/culture complex. A playwright is constantly drawing on his knowledge of drama as a whole (and, ultimately, culture as a whole) as his "vocabulary" or his "subject matter." At the same time, his audience is always relating what it sees and hears to the play as a whole, and beyond that, to other plays it has already seen and heard, so that a dramatic work is always experienced at least secondarily as metadramatic."

> Roblin: As I have listened, I have thought how delighted Lloyd George, Asquith, and other British statesmen would have been if they had been approached in the same ladylike manner as I have been today. A mother has a hundredfold more influence in shaping public opinion around her dinner table than she would have in the market place, hurling her eloquent phrases to the multitude. I believe that woman suffrage would break up the home. It would throw the children into the arms of the servant girls! (E48)
>
> . . .
>
> Nellie: As I have listened, I have thought how delighted Lady Lloyd George, Queen Mary, and other British stateswomen would have been if they had been approached in as gentlemanly a manner as I have been today. As to the work of woman, woman has toiled early and woman has toiled late so that the idol of her heart might have the culture and accomplishment that we see here in this man today. So surely as the sun arose today in the east and will set in the west, so surely, if we extend the vote to men, they will take a backward step -- and fall off their pedestals. Why upset yourselves? Politics is an unsettling business, and unsettled men mean unsettled bills, broken furniture, broken vows and divorce! (E54)

In the end, Roblin's Tories are defeated by scandal and greed, rather than by a suffragist juggernaut, but Roblin's resignation paves the way for the Liberals, who on January 27, 1916, amend the Elections Act of Manitoba to "extend the franchise to women." (E73)

What Glorious Times They Had can best be described as a musical satire which refocuses attention on a crucial point in the past, using as dramatic glue for its episodic structure the well-known public issue of the fight for female suffrage. The play's message is made accessible by its music and metadramatic techniques; issues are explained and recalcitrant male politicians satirized, but the audience is not alienated by lectures or overt polemics. Through its satire and metadramatic techniques, What Glorious Times They Had good-humouredly jostles its audience, causing, to use Hornby's words, "unease [and] a dislocation of perception" (32). In short, the play functions as a successful feminist drama by illuminating inequities of a past era as a means of stimulating the audience to cast a critical eye upon contemporary society, where long-standing injustices still lurk and flourish, in the hopes that it too may be changed.

The play's historical characters are not fully drawn because their role in the play is to reinforce the importance of public, collective action to better women's lot, not to trace the development of one exceptional individual. In this sense, the play can be said to be anti-heroic. One does not get -- nor does the play's mandate require -- a sense of Nellie McClung or Francis Beynon as private individuals. Rather, their function in the play is to demonstrate the power of sorority, the need to shoulder a shared cause to effect social change. This approach falls within the Canadian documentary tradition pursued by George Luscombe, wherein public lives and facts are a drama's focus. However, subsequent playwrights within this chapter attempt, with varying degrees of success, to move beyond documentary and fuse the political and the personal. A more fully delineated and complex portrait of Nellie and Francis as women struggling to integrate the public and private aspects of their roles as women activists is found in Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days. In explaining the women's characters in greater depth, Lill demonstrates that the fight for women's suffrage is a much more complicated issue than What Glorious Times They Had demonstrates.

ii

Carol Bolt's Red Emma, Queen of the Anarchists marks a first important attempt among English-Canadian playwrights to deal with personal growth in the context of political struggle. First performed at the Toronto Free Theatre in early 1974, Red Emma is, nevertheless, a somewhat unsatisfactory attempt at reclamation of an historical figure, Emma Goldman (1869-1940). Limited by Bolt's weak historical analysis, Red Emma, unlike Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days, fails to clarify the vital link between a female character's personal growth and her perception of her role in society. Emma, for all her charm and verve, never seems to attain the maturity or wisdom of Francis Beynon. In short, Bolt's Emma, despite her undeniable spirit and her reading of revolutionary tracts, never seems to analyse logically the need to attain clarity about her role as independent of the mainstream male-dominated politics swirling around her. In fact, Bolt's Emma is far too easily swayed and seduced by the values of her male compatriots. Throughout the play, she is a woman in danger of losing, rather than finding herself in collective action.

Bolt, who has been a practising playwright for over twenty years, obtained early dramatic experience with director George

Luscombe at Toronto Workshop Product[illegible]s and then with Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille, where she worked on Buffalo Jump and Pauline in the early seventies. Writer-broadcaster Sandra Souchotte describes Bolt as a playwright who has "shaped a unique form of social documentary drama which uses factual reference material to gain access to an imaginative Canadian mythology."[51] The play about Goldman is a departure for Bolt, whose more usual focus is upon such Canadian "heroes" as Louis Riel, Pauline Johnson and Norman Bethune. Bolt recalls gender inequities during her early professional theatre experience with Luscombe:

> I think there were thirteen, maybe fifteen people in the company (and only two of them were women!). A good friend of mine, Diane Grant, was one of the two women, and in those days the women's roles were mostly the type where they would bring drinks to the men on stage, while the men pretended to be Che Guevera. Now Luscombe really did want to give the women something to do besides come out of cakes, so I wrote a script with Diane in mind in which she got to play both a prostitute and a nun -- a double character[52]

Bolt's 1973 version of Red Emma, also written with a specific actress (Chapelle Jaffe) in mind, was a success when it premièred in Toronto but a failure later in Bolt's home town of Winnipeg.[53]

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[51] Sandra Suchotte, "Introduction," Playwrights in Profile: Carol Bolt (Toronto, Playwrights Co-op, 1976), p. 7.

[52] Carol Bolt interviewed in Fair Play:12 Women Speak, eds. Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1990), p. 177.

[53] A film version of Red Emma, directed for the CBC by Martin Kinch (who also directed the 1974 Toronto Free Theatre production) and Allan King, was broadcast in January, 1976.

The play stems from her early period, about which Bolt recalls:

> I'd concluded that audiences were more likely to be interested automatically because they're hearing about a "famous" person. Like Emma Goldman: people revere her, she's changed people's lives. (178)

However, Bolt's decision to show a very young Emma, just 20 and at the start of her political education, ultimately limits the play's power. Unless the audience knows Goldman's full history as a political reformer, Red Emma seems to trivialize her life and work as it captures her at a passionate, but naive, period.[54] Furthermore, a materialist-feminist's reading of Bolt's own views about Emma's character would find fault with the playwright's rather offhand treatment of the connection between Emma's personal discoveries about her society's economic inequities and her later political autonomy and commitment. Nor does the play appear to take seriously the issue of women's solidarity.

Bolt describes herself as interested in writing about people "who want to change the world," but she does not see Goldman as a "hero" according to male traditions:

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[54] Emma Goldman, "The Modern Drama: A Powerful Disseminator of Radical Thought," in Anarchism and Other Essays (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911). Goldman anticipated modern feminist dramatists in that she saw drama as a potent vehicle for change, writing that, "the modern drama, operating through the double channel of dramatist and interpreter, affecting as it does both mind and heart, is the strongest force in developing social discontent, swelling the powerful tide of unrest that sweeps onward and over the dam of ignorance, prejudice, and superstition." In her later book, The Social Significance of Modern Drama (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1914), p. 69, she noted that, "Both Radical and Conservative have to learn that any mode of creative work, which with true perception portrays social wrongs earnestly and boldly, may be a greater menace to our social fabric and a more powerful inspiration than the wildest harangue of the soapbox orator."

> . . . what I see when I look at . . . Emma Goldman. . . is not a "Hardy Boy" kind of character who can isolate what's wrong and then fix it. I see a complex woman who goes beyond what is reasonable in her quest.[55]

Bolt's vision of Emma is that she is a Romantic, but "power is not something that consciously concerns her":

> She is powerful. She's charismatic and manipulates her friends and she does that naturally, naively. (186)

Surely Bolt here underestimates both the latent potency of Emma's character and the feminist playwright's role in dramatizing the connection between women's private growth and public empowerment. When Red Emma was first produced, some critics excoriated it for its apparent endorsement of violence. Bolt neither accepts this judgement nor does she "find Red Emma a searing political statement." Instead, she sees it as a coming-of-age drama:

> [It is] a play about very young people who are standing up and saying, I will do this to change the world, and I'll die for it if necessary. If you produce it acknowledging that they're saying outrageous things, then they don't seem outrageous; you see where they're coming from. But if you approach it in the more realistic vein, then you have to realize they're advocating terrorism. And I don't think that's a reasonable reaction. I think Red Emma is a play about people who are very young and have all these ideals which are corrupted.[56]

Surely Bolt is mistaken in these dismissive comments about her own characters. A materialist-feminist reading of Red Emma uncovers a female character's "getting-of-wisdom" experience and an analysis of the role men attempt to assign to women within the workers' struggle. And that surely makes it a very political -- albeit, in Bolt's handling, vascillating and unfocused -- play. It is important to note that Emma, the female character, is not the only character who is gullible -- everyone in the play falls from grace when their idealism clashes with reality.

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[55] Carol Bolt interviewed in Fair Play, p. 181.

[56] Carol Bolt in The Work: Conversations with English Canadian Playwrights, ed. Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1982), p. 269.

Bolt creates tension within the play by juxtaposing the impassioned but juvenile posturing of young radicals Emma and Alexander (Sasha) Berkman -- and to a less serious, more opportunistic extent Helen Minkin and Fedya -- with the menacing and monolithic "adult" behaviors of the Pinkerton agent Parks, the industrialist Henry Clay Frick and his secretary-henchman Kreiderman. Bolt shifts scenes back and forth between the two worlds, that of the idealistic youths and the amoral adults -- contrasting the powerful-but-plodding stupidity of Parks and Kreiderman with the unstable brilliance of Emma and Sasha; the fallen idealism of Johan Most with the innate Machiavellianism of Frick -- both of whom enjoy and abuse their power. Most, an established "revolutionary pamphleteer," has become world-weary, cynical and self-indulgent. He is Emma's ideal; initially she is blind to his failings, particularly his exploitation of his admirers and his need to make conquests of vulnerable young women.

When Bolt's Emma arrives in New York in 1860 in search of political adventure, she is bold enough to proclaim, "Emma is not bound to any man."[57] In fact, as we soon see, she cannot live up to her youthful bravado and becomes embroiled in a number of alliances, none of which serves her very well. Unlike Lill's Francis, Emma does not ally herself with a doughty group of women who work together for change. Instead, she flits and flirts on the edges of male endeavours. The dissatisfying -- even annoying -- aspect of Red Emma is its fecklessness towards principles of true and self-sufficient female liberation.

Emma is the kind of dynamic personality who immediately sets off sparks among all those who know her: she discovers sexual ecstacy with young Sasha and later takes up with his friend Fedya, professing to love both of them. But while her body is thus enmeshed, her mind is affected by the seductive power of the manipulative Most, whom she considers her mentor. Free spirit though Emma claims to be, she is still susceptible to seduction. She proclaims that Most is "the lifeblood of anarchy" (134). However, from his first condescending offer to "lend you some books," Emma begins to receive a "woman's education" along with her political initiation (137). Although Most assures Emma that he doesn't "mean to be patronizing," and she responds, "oh, you aren't" (137), she soon learns that, in fact, Most does not take women seriously, that he underestimates her as merely one of the many sycophantic followers whom he scorns:

> Most: I don't believe women have revolutionary
> zeal. Do you?

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[57] Carol Bolt, Red Emma, Queen of the Anarchists in Playwrights in Profile (Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1976), p. 2.

> Emma: Of course I do.
> Most: Your friend Helen Minkin is looking for a husband.
> Emma: Now you're joking. Now you're patronizing. (139)

But like Sasha and Fedya, Most is enchanted by Emma's honesty and her ardour. He offers to take her on as his student, to teach her to "speak well."

Of course, Most's offer is based on self-interest more than anarchist fervor: it is flattering to be idolized by a sexually naive but bright young woman whom one can "tell what to say" (140). Here Bolt ironically illustrates a disappointing fact of sexual politics: even a master anarchist still pursues a personal life according to patriarchal tenets of male superiority over women. In fact, Most is portrayed as cynical, something of a wastrel and an opportunist, quite unworthy of Emma's adulation, and certainly not the least bit iconoclastic in his views of women.

Although it takes her longer to see through her mentor, Emma is more perceptive about Berkman, whose paternalism she identifies:

> You treat women very badly, don't you? A woman is never your comrade. A woman is always your child. (142)

Nor does Emma's early worship of Most allow her to succumb as his domestic slave:

> Most: You will do me a kindness, Emma. You will pick up after me. Bring me peace and order.
> Emma: Me?
> Most: You will give me time for my work.
> Emma: You're much neater than I am.
> Most: Everything is chaos and I cannot work in chaos.
> Emma: You will clean it up.
> Most: You will clean it up. (148)

In fact, Most is so disconcerted by Emma's resistance he begins to tidy the room, and then continues to tell a rambling, theatrical, self-pitying story leading to an offer of marriage which Emma sidesteps by referring instead to her impending speaking engagement in Rochester.

Most has instructed Emma that she doesn't need to understand the issues surrounding the eight-hour day; she merely has to follow notes he has given her -- and, in a most unliberated, sheep-like fashion, she does so. But in fact, functioning as Most's puppet teaches Emma a lesson: that Most is fallible, and that the workers' concerns must not be brushed aside. Upon her return, unmoved by the bunch of violets Most proffers, she speaks out:

> I will not be treated like a silly woman. You sent me out to speak for you like a trained dog. I've made a fool of myself. I didn't speak for myself, I said your words. I've said pretentious, pompous things. There are men who work fourteen hours a day. I spoke to them. One man came up after my lecture, Johann. Grey-headed, his hands shook. He had spent his life on a factory assembly line, Johann, and I learned more from his simple words than from all your books. You care only for the symmetry of your world. You only want your philosophy secure. (159)

Emma's speech leads us to hope she has moved beyond her role as romantic child-woman and is now strong enough to resist Most's subsequent vituperation.

Emma's break with Most ("I think for myself! I speak for myself!") seems to free her to react honestly, to speak out of her own heart and experience. Her speech at the rally for the Clockmakers' Union is powerfully feminist in flavor:

> Woman's development, her freedom, her independence must come from and through herself. First by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second by refusing the right to anyone over her body, by refusing to bear children unless she wants them, by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society and husband, the family. . . : by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities, by freeing herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation. Only that will set woman free, will make her a force hitherto unknown in the world, a force of real love, for peace, for harmony -- a force of divine fire, of life-giving, a creator of free men and women. (161)

But unlike Lill's Francis Beynon, who is able to stand back from her friendship with her editor/boss McNair to note how he would control her life were he her husband, Emma cannot seem to make a connection between her public rhetoric and the necessity to give it embodiment in her private life. The power of Emma's speech is undermined because it follows a scene in which Most and Sasha have argued over her, just after Feyda offers to "declare his intentions." Bolt misses an opportunity to further explore woman's need to fuse private experience with public intent to create a strong, autonomous character. Instead, she glosses over how difficult it is for a passionate young woman caught up in the fervour of the moment to extricate herself from the seductive and powerful world of men's demands of sexual ownership, even as she strives to be a politically independent thinker. The irony is that none of these "anarchists" can see the deep conservativism of their own attitudes towards the very women who would be their "comrades."

When examining Emma's overall behaviour, however, modern feminists from both the materialist and radical camps would contend that Bolt seems of two minds about whether she intends to create a full-blown feminist hero. Emma is a young woman struggling to become an independent person, but she is too often co-opted by the male world in spite of herself. Although Emma criticizes Most for exploiting Helen and calls him "an idiot who thinks all women are fools" (168), she is still swept away by men's values and actions. When Berkman decides to "accomplish an act of significance" by assassinating Andrew Carnegie's henchman, Henry Clay Frick, Emma says, "I'll help you, Sasha" (171), showing her acceptance of violence as a solution and her eagerness yet again to serve as a man's helpmate. Still, the men consider Emma's sex a problem: neither Berkman nor Fedya will allow her to try to gain access to Frick's office; furthermore, even though Most is right when he scoffs at Berkman's scheme and calls him a "brainless romantic," personal jealousy is his real reason for refusing to donate money to the project. In fact, however, Emma's femaleness does finance Berkman's scheme: she poses (doubly betraying herself both by accepting male objectification of women and then by enacting it, however ineptly!) as a prostitute and extracts ten dollars from Frick, whom she then informs of her plans "to buy a pistol" (177). However, this act makes her look like a dupe of men's objectification and expectations rather than a self-defining personality acting on her own. She needs her male comrades' respect but doesn't seem to realize how she jeopardizes her own self-respect in the process of serving male plots.

After the foolhardy "political aassassination" goes predictably awry, Emma's principles dictate that she obtain help for Berkman, who has been sentenced to 22 years in prison for his attempted murder of Frick. When Most denounces Berkman publicly, Emma severs her final ties with her former mentor, calling him "a coward and a traitor," and hurling his own words back at him as she strikes him with her belt. This powerful image of the former "child" turning on the "father" figure implies that Emma's self-liberation is complete -- but it would be much more compelling if we did not suspect that she is still in thrall to Sasha.
And the play's final song, sung by Emma alone, suggests that she is unwilling to succumb to cynicism, even if her mentor has been revealed to stand upon feet of clay:

> I know I will do my living
> In my future not your past
> There are certain stirring speeches
> There are drumbeats every morning
> And the chance that things will
> start to move too fast. (184)

The feminist spectator is left hoping that, although the forces facing Emma are formidable -- Parks and Frick, after all, continue their machinations -- she will perhaps finally begin marching to drumbeats of her own choosing. But even now Bolt cavils: when the cynical Fedya tells Emma that she is "pure and fine and gullible," one wonders if he is expressing a wish that he were so graced or if he is dismissing her naiveté in the world of politics. This equivocation makes Red Emma, despite its occasional fine moments, an ultimately unsatisfying drama for a materialist-feminist spectator. Although Bolt suggests that social change must be predicated upon economic realignment and ends the play upon a transformative note, which implies Emma is capable of becoming a principled leader rather than a besotted follower, her insistence upon portraying Emma as a victim of her own youth and feckless naiveté undermines the drama's ultimate power. Political points can be made humorously without diminishing or mocking the inherent seriousness of a character's quest for growth, as both Wendy Lill and Linda Griffiths so ably demonstrate in their respective plays The Fighting Days and Maggie and Pierre.

In Red Emma, Bolt gives us a protagonist who is a romantic individualist whose political purpose is undermined by her sexual impulses and her confusion about her roles in relation to male sexual and political "authority." Bolt is more concerned with character development here than with fully exploring gender consciousness and its connection to vital and succesful political activism. If viewed from a radical feminist perspective, this play is "soft" in all the wrong places: Bolt sacrifices an exploration of political conflict between men and women working for the Anarchist cause to a more liberal-feminist "getting-of-wisdom" agenda which in turn sacrifices collective action at the altar of individualism. It is significant to note that Emma's speech at the end of the play relies on the first-person singular pronoun "I," and not the plural "we." True, she has learned some truths about herself; but she seems unable to connect them to an external political agenda.

iii

John Murrell's Waiting for the Parade[58] focuses upon group action, but explores it through a revelation of the private lives of a group of women within a particular historic group -- the women left at home during the Second World War while "their men" went off to fight fascism. Murrell's play reflects a situation in which women react to outside events according to a set of circumstances dictated to them by others. They are not seizing hold of political action to alter the status quo; rather, they are upholding it by being supportive in their auxiliary work for the "war effort." Despite Murrell's obvious sympathy for his characters' dilemmas, Waiting for the Parade clearly lacks an analysis based upon a gender-consciousness which results in a feminist script, a fact which may support critic Robert Wallace's contention that men cannot inhabit feminist sensibilities, although they may be sympathetic to feminist philosophies.

When Waiting for the Parade was first performed by Alberta Theatre Projects at the Canmore Opera House in early 1977, audiences were delighted with its fresh view of the Second World War as seen from a female viewpoint. Women's role in the war effort, and women's feelings about militarism generally, had not been seriously explored from a Canadian perspective in drama before. (Since then, Margaret Hollingsworth's War Babies, which premièred in 1984, and Jenny Munday's Battle Fatigue [59], first produced by Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre in the autumn of 1989, have appeared.) Furthermore, a Canadian drama which offered five substantial roles for female actors and a plot in which all male characters were deliberately kept offstage was a truly novel experiment at that time.

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[58] John Murrell, Waiting for the Parade (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980).

When I first saw the play, I was intrigued by the "femaleness" of the world Murrell had created -- although I did not think much about the subtext of that world or what the roles assigned to its characters said about the nature of women's "freedom." A 1991 feminist re-reading of Waiting for the Parade confirms that a play can be sympathetic to and wholly about women, yet not be feminist in its dramatic analysis. Murrell's main concern is simply to capture accurately and sympathetically a certain historic moment from a particular perspective: the "war" as fought on the home front by the women left behind in Canada. Nevertheless, it is laudatory that, during a time when feminism was so tentatively emerging (in Canadian society as a whole as well as in theatre), he chose a female vantage point from which to explore a significant historic event.[60]

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[59] Jenny Munday, "Battle Fatigue" in Canadian Theatre Review, No. 62, Spring 1990 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 50 - 74.

[60] John Murrell frequently tells stories about strong and iconoclastic women: he tackles the Divine Sarah Bernhardt in Memoir. And in Farther West (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1985), Murrell creates a compelling character in prostitute May Buchanan. However, May's vibrant, questing independence is no match for the puritanical, obsessive Seward, who simultaneously lusts after her and considers her "sort" evil. May dies a victim of Seward's

At the time of its debut, Waiting for the Parade disappointed some critics, who seemed prepared neither for its non-linear, episodic development which told several characters' stories in a discontinuous fashion, nor for its portrayal of a female world. The most bumptiously misogynistic of these critics, one realizes today, probably did not even suspect their own limitations. For instance, in the collection Canadian Drama and the Critics[61], the epitome of misunderstanding of Murrell's intentions can be found in a review by The Calgary Herald's Brian Brennan. Apparently convinced that women without men lead no lives at all, Brennan concedes that the play's five characters "are potentially interesting because they have biographies that suggest the possibility of climactic futures." [?] Aside from being convinced the play "has nothing to say to a person under 30 living in Canada today" (are we to conclude, on the other hand, that battlefront vignettes from five male characters necessarily would?), Brennan is greatly peeved that "most of the action in this play takes place off stage" (196). Such a comment suggests three things: that the critic does not deem homeside war work as "action"; that women's lives are inherently "drama-less" because they focus on a domestic realm; that women's stories are intrinsically boring and pointless -- unless there are

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fanaticism, brutally murdered. Clearly Murrell is sympathetic to May, but his vision does not include her attainment of the freedom she has always craved.

[61] L.W. Conolly, editor, Canadian Drama and the Critics (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987).

men on stage with them to add dash to their drab lives.[62]

And although it is not true that female audiences are as likely as male to find Waiting for the Parade "annoyingly domestic and vague" (199), a modern feminist will be frustrated by the enforced passivity of the lives of Murrell's five characters. However, Murrell, to his credit, does create five distinct characters, some of whom resist the prevailing (male) wisdom. Each of the five women struggles to be strong in her own way even if, like the martinet Janet, she chooses unpleasantly aggressive ways to express herself. A character co-opted by prevailing wisdom, Janet is a slave-driver for the war effort and thus an unquestioning supporter of militaristic cant. When the women are handing out treats to the departing troops at the railway station, Janet parrots the official line always cited to convince soldiers their efforts are not in vain:

> Tell them how swell they look. Tell them they're fighting to preserve a way of life that's precious to you. Think about them, not yourself. (37)

According to Janet's view of the world, men must be heroes, and heroes must always fight; therefore, to refuse to engage in combat is unmanly. Women's role, of course, is to be cheerleaders and towers of strength for those heroes. However, as the play progresses, it becomes evident that Janet's biggest fear is of being ostracized because her radio announcer husband has not gone overseas, thus has not pursued "acceptable" male behavior. Murrell here makes a point many feminists would endorse: he shows how both Janet and her husband are tyrannized by prevailing definitions of proper manhood.

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[62] Two years later, in a review of Waiting for the Parade (Calgary Herald, Monday, Feb. 5, 1979, p. C9) Brennan seems to have reconsidered Murrell's work and found it much improved: "Characters have been fleshed out, biographies have been given depth and breadth, and the continuity between the monologues and episodic vignettes that make up the play now seems stronger and more unified."

Enslaved by the same stereotypic thinking about gender roles, Margaret sees her youngest son, an anti-war agitator, as an embarrassment and a failure. Obviously, both Margaret and Janet might be seen as "honorary men" because they have whole-heartedly bought into what might be termed a male view of history which demands heroism. However, Janet is betrayed by her unquestioning alliance with the militaristic status quo (she is loathed by the other women -- especially Margaret -- whom she badgers incessantly) and by her efforts on behalf of her husband's reputation (he cheats on her with one of his co-workers at the radio station). It is refreshing to find a Canadian drama where a wife's martyrdom is not rewarded but revealed as self-serving and held up to question. Murrell's skill as a playwright is such that he nevertheless affectingly captures Janet's pain and bewilderment (in Scene Eighteen) when she admits the truth about her husband's affair.

The most appealing and complex of the five women is Catherine who is angry that her husband Billie volunteered without first talking it over with her. Catherine admits she's affected by the handsome figure Billie cuts in his uniform, but she also openly questions society's ideals about male heroism:

> . . . somewhere inside a man's big skull, along with the honour and the glory -- and the charm -- there ought to be some space for good sense and -- a little mutual respect. That's all I'm saying. (9)

While Billie is away, Catherine is raising her young daughter and working in the canteen at a munitions plant. She hasn't written her husband "for permission to take a job," she tells Eve because "he would've said 'no.' " And when she gets the telegram saying Billie is missing, Catherine acquires some "washtub" brew and gets literally falling-down drunk, much to the horror of the matriarch Margaret, whose pessimism about her two sons' futures is rivalled only by her hatred of Janet. Catherine's realization of the toll claimed by her separation from her husband is also an argument against the facile romanticization of war:

> If they want to make the Hollywood blockbuster of all time -- one of those stories of tragic romance -- sure to have every woman in the theatre reaching for her hanky -- they should tell the story of a woman -- whose husband goes away -- but he goes away, one piece at a time. First an arm vanishes. Then a leg. Then his eyes. His hands. His teeth. Finally she can't remember what he looked like -- at all. (62)

Catherine here shows an awareness of, and a complete sense of separation from, the mythologizing of which she, and all citizens, including Billie, are victims. She demonstrates an ironic awareness of the motivation behind the war effort which a knowing audience also shares. So poignantly does Murrell sketch Catherine's dilemma that when it becomes evident she has finally succumbed and "said yes" to tall, dark Jim down at the plant, it is impossible to dismiss her as "a whore." As Marta realizes, it is a way for

Catherine to "manage to stay alive" (83). Purveyors of conventional 1940s wisdom (and they still inhabit today's audiences) undoubtedly would have branded Catherine a slut, survivor's instincts or not.

One of the most positive aspects about Waiting for the Parade is the subtlety with which Murrell challenges the era's stereotypic assumptions about women's roles. He manages to replace some of the stereotypes with more honest pictures: wives, such as Catherine, don't always stay faithful to their absent "heroes"; well-intentioned do-gooders, such as Janet, are not always likable human beings; rabid pacifists, such as Eve, can sometimes betray their own principles and point a "thirty ought-six Winchester rifle" at their war-mongering husbands to gain a few moments' peace; long-suffering mothers, such as Margaret, often resent their duties and sometimes do not live to rejoice in their children's achievements; dutiful daughters, such as Marta, are repaid with suspicion and abuse by both society and their own fathers.

However, when one applies a materialist-feminist critique to Waiting for the Parade -- even when noting Murrell's genuine sympathy for women's roles and lives -- one sees that the play is limited by its perspective on its subject. Ultimately, Waiting for the Parade is prevented from becoming a powerful feminist statement by its own realism: because it is a deliberate and accurate portrayal of a slice of history, there is not much room for any of the characters to grow beyond the role assigned them by their era. Its plot allows the five women characters only their passing (and ultimately trivial) chances to undermine the status quo. Furthermore, the play implies women have no life unless it is in tandem with men; the women become fit subjects for Murrell's play because of their links with men and their reaction to the male-initiated business of war. The very passivity of the five women's lives -- waiting for the men to come home, awaiting the end of the conflict -- holds them in a dramatic limbo wherein the allowable gamut of reactions is limited and thus the scope to develop a feminist play is similarly hobbled.

And finally, the audience members' understanding of the play is freighted by their own knowledge of history: in the final scene, as the four women "wait . . . wait . . . wait . . .," their inaction is underscored by contemporary awareness that the war's conclusion will mean an end to their freedom to lead independent lives and work outside the home. After the armistice comes the beginning of the fifties, an era when the only fully acceptable roles for women were dedicated domesticity and contented motherhood -- the era, lest we forget, of Father Knows Best. Whatever wisdom Murrell's five characters have gained will have to go underground once "their men" return, and society returns to "normal."

iv

The earning-of-wisdom motif continues in Linda Griffiths's one-woman show Maggie & Pierre[63]. But here the problems of power and sexuality are explored in a much more sophisticated fashion, with a more layered context, than is the case in Red Emma. Margaret Sinclair's quest for personal selfhood is connected with national politics. And Maggie & Pierre is a purely theatrical vehicle in which Griffiths eschews realistic representation of historical events, choosing instead to use, as does Diane Grant in What Glorious Times They Had, vignettes, song and music.

With Paul Thompson as director, Griffiths first staged Maggie & Pierre in November, 1979, exploring politics as both a public and private event. The play exploited societal assumptions about gender, sexual identity, and androgyny -- even as it raised questions about such issues. The production seems to have anticipated the connection between private growth and awareness and public utterance and commitment which Wendy Lill was to explore in The Fighting Days just three years later. And to re-read Maggie & Pierre in 1991, long after "Trudeaumania" has abated, is to discover a dated but nonetheless feminist play which explores the links between power and sexuality within private and public realms. Feminist traits can be found in the play's casting, which uses the technique of multiple characterization to allow actress/creator Griffiths to play male and female characters -- Pierre Trudeau, Margaret Sinclair, and the journalist Henry -- and to challenge audience conceptions of gender definitions just as

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[63] Linda Griffiths with Paul Thompson, Maggie and Pierre -- a fantasy of love, politics and the media (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980)

What Glorious Times They Had challenged the differences in status between Canadians of British and non-British extraction. Furthermore, Maggie & Pierre was developed through improvisations resulting in techniques which address the viewer directly, breaking down the fourth wall between actors and audience. Written in two acts consisting of nineteen scenes, the play tells the story of winning and losing love/power in a brisk, episodic format.

Explaining that the play evolved from her perception of people's "emotional connection to politics" which is "not a logical process" (9), Griffiths saw the story of Maggie and Pierre as a love triangle:

> you fall in love with Trudeau; you fall in love with Canada. Trudeau falls in love with Margaret Sinclair.(9)

Furthermore, Griffiths began to explore the sense of tension for everyone implicated in the triangle:

> I began to see that journalists who had this connection to politics were part of a triangle. In terms of the triangle (if we're making an analogy between love of country and politics), they form the apex. They became involved in politics and they told the country about it. So actually, there's a fourth character in the play: the audience, who represent the people of Canada. And from their point of view, what they watched was the marriage of two people disintegrate. (9)

In this respect, Maggie & Pierre may be the first Canadian play which took so literally a dramatization of the seventies' feminist slogan, "The personal is political."

In Maggie & Pierre, Griffiths astutely sketches the anatomy of a romance on both a public, political and a private, personal level. Crucial to this process is the jousting between two polar opposites -- passion and reason, as represented by Maggie and Pierre respectively. In that juxtapositioning, Griffiths is exploring a loss of innocence in both lovers, each of whom has had unrealistic expectations, and in Canadians themselves, as they watch a "perfect" leader reveal (however reluctantly) signs of humanity, thus imperfection. The drama of these struggles comes, as Henry rightly observes, from the "larger than life" quality of the protagonists:

> They're huge, they're giants . . . two epic characters, and they carry on a mythological struggle. They're King Arthur and Guinevere, and Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, and they play out our pain way up there. (16)

During its initial two or three years of existence, the strength of Maggie & Pierre was its immediacy, its dramatization of events which had energized Canada and altered as never before the political status quo, suggesting that Canadian leaders could be sexy, daring, "world-class," and memorable.

But the play also traces the education of Maggie, a vapid nineteen-year-old when Trudeau first meets her in Tahiti, who wants "to be world-renowned, to shape destiny, to be deliriously happy." Her naive ambitious summation, " You might say I want it all," is echoed by Trudeau, although it becomes rapidly evident each of them has in mind a different slice of territory when speaking of "all." The difficulty, au fond, is that Maggie and Pierre are unequally matched spirits dedicated to different icons: hers is passionate freedom and fun; his is cerebral contemplation and reason. Where

Maggie is still stumbling about to "find" herself, Trudeau can state with assurance his goals:

> I will become like an alchemist and forge out of everyone's opinion, a shining wheel of a party, a wheel that will go ever forward, and just a little to the Left. (23)

The struggle is a tug-of-war between Renaissance Man and Flower Child; while Trudeau has been opinionated and self-propelling since childhood, vowing to fight "first myself, then anyone who dares me" (32), Margaret, reared to be "a good girl," tries to please everybody (Daddy, Mr. Jenkins, the captain of the football team), and is obviously dependent upon external (male) validification. Unfortunately, by the time Margaret is twenty-two years old and weds Trudeau, she is still a reactive personality without any firm inner core upon which to base her behavior. She is certainly no match for a prime minister who is "two years older" than her mother.

Pierre, the man of reason must confess the ultimate irrationality: he is in love and is "thinking of marrying a twenty-two year old flower child." The reasonable response to such an idea emanates from Henry, who pragmatically points out what becoming a husband would do to Pierre's standing in the polls:

> I think it's a really stupid idea. Look, most of the women in the country vote for you because they think you're going to come through the bedroom window one night. I mean, think of all the votes! . . . Show me one of those May-to-September things that has ever worked out. Just one . . . You can't trust a woman like that. Treat her like you treat the Cabinet . . . .tell the dolly, "no go" . . . sir. (45)

The voice of reason, in this case, is blatantly sexist, but Henry gives Pierre the astute political advice of a cynical man-about-town: use the babe, don't marry her. Henry believes Trudeau is marrying Maggie to avoid "becoming one of those grey-faced zombies that wander around Ottawa." Margaret, Henry thinks, is "supposed to balance the act" (46). But Henry finds the relationship is not a simple as he thinks:

> She's using her youth against his age -- no -- he's using his age against her youth. . . . They're doing it to each other . . . . No, there's got to be a bad guy and there's got to be a victim. . . . (47)

Explaining this attraction by conventional theories of polarized-opposites doesn't work. Despite her innocence -- and ignorance -- Margaret has an energy of her own which is not amenable to the usual societal strictures. As Trudeau sees it, Margaret has sparked in him, and in Canada, the "jolt of electricity," the "irrationality" that he and the rest of the nation lost "somewhere along the line" (57).

However, although Pierre fantasizes about the "Reasonable, Yet Impulsive Just Society," when it comes to the October Crisis and the demands made by the FLQ, he dismisses the "protests of a few weak-kneed bleeding hearts," and clamps down with the War Measures Act. When Henry asks, "How far are you willing to go with that?" Trudeau's response, "Just watch me," (61) has more sinister connotations than his flirtatious boast when he first met Margaret in Tahiti. Griffiths seems to be obliquely prodding at the apparently anomalous relationship between "power" and "freedom." Indeed, as Margaret finds, freedom -- from surveillance, from expectations, from duties -- is largely absent at 24 Sussex Drive, the seat of power. As Trudeau becomes more confident, more arrogant, Margaret is increasingly miserable until, in Act Two, Scene 4, she blurts out:

> I just got bored, just this minute. A frozen moment in time. Boredom came crashing through the ceiling and landed right there on the carpet like a piece of rotting meat. What am I doing with this man? (66)

Along with that revelation comes Maggie's realization that "nothing is certain, anything is possible," which is the beginning of the end of her arrangement with Pierre, although he patronizingly, smugly, urges her to "experience it to the end of your synapse." Thus Griffiths brings the spectre of chaos into the stringently structured world Pierre inhabits, asking (as does Margaret Hollingsworth in Alli Alli Oh and Islands) whether inappropriate behavior is a choice, a way of either coping or escaping. Is Maggie a brainless nit or a bewildered innocent? (Each possibility reflects a paternalistic view which assigns woman to extreme opposites similar to the Whore or Madonna categorization so frequently found in literature.) Or does she meet Henry at the Press Club and talk about her garter belt, her emerging need for psychiatric care, her ruined "brown and sticky" nipples, as a deliberate rebellion, as a means of blasting out of the cage of decorum which is stifling and confining her? Or, more surprising yet, is her motive, as Henry belatedly suspects, that she is actually "capable of ambition"? Henry finds this idea so novel, of course, because pretty girls are not expected to be ambitious, are seldom considered clever enough to imagine they might be more than mere ornaments.

When Pierre arrives to fetch home his errant wife, before she does any more damage while "humanizing" his image, Henry resists with, "Aha! I knew it. You're a dictator in the House and a dictator in the house," adding that he doesn't like the way Pierre treats his wife, journalists, or the country. In typical Romantic fashion in an atypical romantic setting, both Maggie and the faith of the nation are the "prizes " Pierre and Henry must joust over. In the end, Maggie cannot adapt to Pierre's world of "Reason Over Passion." She opts for the unreasonable choice, "having fun," and, in Henry's words, "run[s] off with the Rolling Stones. . . The Bad Boys of Rock" (86). When Henry corners Pierre, the Prime Minister's shocked first reaction to her departure is an intellectualization. He notes the:

> absurd sense of the perfection of the cosmic joke. I mean, a woman with half my intelligence has completely checkmated me. You have to give her credit. It's perfect. (88)

[illegible] usual, Pierre has expected that his intellect will save him, but he has not counted upon Margaret's resistance to the forces of reason or her own belief in the empowerment inherent in disrupting the status quo. Henry, the good reporter, probes, asking "what else?" And Pierre's answer, read from a feminist perspective, could be a description of all that's wrong with the cool, linear, rational model generally accepted as the "male" method of coping:

> As we were going through all those horrendous

> fights, my wife was at my feet, and she was crying and screaming and wailing and literally banging her head against the wall, and I stood there, frozen, in the classic pose of man, locked in my own gender, not knowing whether to go to her and comfort her, or leave because it's too personal to watch, or hit her, or what to do. And my dominant emotion was jealousy . . . that she could be so free. Perhaps that's the tragedy of the oppressor. (90)

Pierre, reflecting many men's sad entrapment in masculinity, seems to recognize that his rigid reliance on control and cerebral solutions has cheated him of something, but he also seems powerless to change despite the knowledge of his own "oppression" by his male role. It is also interesting to note the reference to violence, since family therapists posit that wife-battering men resort to physical aggression out of a sense of their own powerlessness.

Maggie & Pierre is a well-orchestrated drama which gradually draws the audience toward its core thesis: the connection between personal and public freedom -- woman's need to liberate herself personally if she is to achieve adult status in the larger world. In Maggie's final speech in the play, a scene brimming with anger and bitterness, she asks, "who's going to be the first one to stone the whore? That silly bitch?" She concludes that she's "the woman that's offended everybody." Her sin: she's failed to be a "superwoman." She's not a mom at breakfast and dinner, a career woman in between and a foxy lover at night; she can't manage the stress of "having it all," hasn't perfected "all this mastery of the Modern Age." Instead, "little Maggie Trudeau" has dared to admit "I can't cope." In short, she has failed to live up to society's image of female perfection, and she has refused to fake perfection by assuming a plastic self. Now initiated into the world of sexual politics, Maggie sees the results of her failure clearly:

> And we don't like that, do we, ladies? Noooo. And we don't like that, do we gentlemen? Nooo. Because if Maggie Trudeau, with all the advantages, falls apart, where does that leave us? In the same boat. (95)

By refusing to become an icon, by hanging on to her humanity and striving to achieve an authentic self, Margaret Trudeau, "the woman who gave freedom a bad name," has refused to be controlled publicly by the political system or privately by her utterly reasonable husband. In short, she's achieved her own identity, even if at a great cost.

"Come on, take a look," Maggie urges. "I'm not afraid." Her lessons of experience have left her cheekiness (now tinged with bitterness) intact. Maggie delivers one last outrageous sally to show her contempt for the judgement she has endured:

> And I have only one question to ask you . . . Which do you think is my best feature, my legs . . . or my bum? (95)

Recognizing she has been objectified by both Pierre and the Public, Maggie can't resist hurling that knowledge in the observers' critical faces, can't resist showing that the "stupid bitch" knows what the game was about after all -- but refuses to join in.

In Maggie & Pierre, Griffiths has created a play fuelled by feminist concerns about private and public duty, about social conditioning and the effect it has upon women's roles, and about the polarized struggle between the visceral and the cerebral which pervades the North American view of human relations, particularly those between men and women. In so doing, she suggests that men are just as trapped within -- and warped by -- rigid gender-based expectations as are women. In this area, particularly, Griffiths achieves a more inclusive drama than Grant, Bolt, or Murrell, whose male characters are, respectively, caricatures, completely unenlightened about women's rights, or totally absent from the scene. Furthermore, as we shall next see, in posing questions about the social order as it applies to men and women alike, Griffiths posits the male dilemma more fully than does either Wendy Lill in The Fighting Days, wherein the major male character, Francis Beynon's boss and would-be husband McNair, never fully understands Fanny's intellectual quest for equality and identity, or Mavis Gallant in What Is To Be Done?, where the male characters are befuddled caricatures, as in the case of Willie, or defeated and dead, as in the case of Molly's and Jenny's fathers.

When Griffiths explores the effect of politics as a struggle for power waged both publicly and privately, and makes Maggie and Pierre metaphors for Female and Male role stereotypes, she challenges conventional attitudes about such divisions. By using a female body to enact both male and female characters, Griffiths is making a point about the possibilities for the co-existence of both male and female qualities within an individual. Such co-existence blasts rigid gender divisions right off stage and thus defeats crippling polarities. Griffith also questions the usual assumptions about what is "masculine" and what is "feminine," and whether correct -- that is, masculine-- responses really guarantee human happiness. By expanding the relationship between Maggie and Pierre from dyad to triad with the addition of the observer/lover Henry, Griffiths both implicates the audience in the Romance, and forces them to examine it with new eyes. This is subversive feminist drama in the best sense of the term.

V

The getting-of-wisdom is an underlying theme in Mavis Gallant's _What Is To Be Done?_[64], but here the playwright uses relentless satire to explore the question of women's quest for autonomous lives. As with _What Glorious Times They Had_, _Red Emma_ and _Waiting for the Parade_, women's ability/inability to resist or subvert male authority lies at the heart of the play. Perhaps its closest cousin is _Waiting for the Parade_, since both plays are set during the Second World War and focus upon the women "left behind." However, whereas John Murrell delivers a "straight," albeit sympathetic, historical recapitulation of women's home-front war work, Gallant comes at the issue from a skewed angle, continually refusing to take seriously war work or any of men's endeavours. Although Gallant's characters purport to be engaged in collective activity, in fact they are a clutch of individuals at cross purposes with each other. As in Murrell's play, group effort here leads to conflict. As for its exploration of Communist solidarity,

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[64] Mavis Gallant, _What Is To Be Done?_ (Dunvegan, Ont.: Quadrant Editions, 1983).

Carol Bolt in Red Emma, despite the picture she paints of sexist and self-serving male comrades, takes the cause much more seriously than does Gallant. Even Red Emma's husband-shopping Helen seems slightly more serious than Gallant's two young would-be Reds, Molly and Jenny. However, Gallant consistently uses humour as a vehicle to discuss political matters. Just as Diane Grant in What Glorious Times They Had subverts male power by making men's high seriousness appear ridiculous, so does Gallant create, in the stunningly earnest Willie, a character who is the butt of women's humour.

Mavis Gallant is internationally recognized for her elegant, accomplished prose, particularly her short stories. She won a Governor General's award in 1982 for one such collection, Home Truths. She is seldom regarded as a dramatist, and the heavily ironic, bordering-on-cynical What Is To Be Done? is her only play to date. In 1988, Gallant vowed to write a second play -- "I certainly will. . . . Everything gets done." -- but if she has done so, it is not yet published.[65] With its title a tongue-in-cheek echo of V.I. Lenin's tract, the world première of What Is To Be Done? was graced by a further ironic note: it took place November 11, 1982, Remembrance Day, at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre. Set in Montreal, the play's 10 scenes trace the growing awareness, and disillusionment, of two veritable babes in the political woods, Molly and Jenny, from August, 1942, through to May, 1945. Molly and Jenny are 20 and 18, respectively, at the play's outset; as the drama progresses, each makes her own discoveries about the nature of politics and her own hitherto slightly explored selfhood. Offsetting the two young women's innocence is the redoubtable, world-weary Mrs. Bailey, whom Gallant describes as "another generation altogether" (10). Although the male characters in the play (five -- six if we count Molly's overseas husband, Duncan) outnumber the female, the drama (like Waiting for the Parade and What Glorious Times They Had) is presented entirely from a woman's viewpoint. Interestingly, only the play's male actors are required to take on double roles. The actors playing Jenny, Molly, and the furious knitter of balaclavas, Mrs. Bailey, each portray only one character throughout. This "inequity" serves to diminish the force of male authority within the play, which is as it should be, since the entire production is a sendup of received political wisdom -- even the wisdom purveyed by the would-be radicals of the "Second Front."

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[65] H. J. Kirchoff, "Gallant at home in Canada," The Globe and Mail, Tuesday, May 31, 1988, p. A14.

Gallant does not absent men from her play; rather, their presence is always mocked by the women sharing the stage with them. In fact, Molly and Jenny frequently behave as if neither Willy nor his "heroic" friend Karl-Heinz were present. In the play's opening scene, the two young women are in Willie Howe's room for political "instruction," but they pay him no heed:

> Willie: (Strong Glasgow) If you two girls are sincerely interested in politics, remember that the first rule is never to have friends who might be friends of other friends.
> Jenny: (Across Willie, to Molly) What do you make of the accent? Is it real?
> Molly: I'm not sure. Wait till he says something else. (11)

Not only are the two friends breaking Willie's primary rule by attending instruction together, they pay no attention to their comrade's plodding dictates. They behave so partly for reasons of coquetry and self-absorption, but also out of an innate disregard for the "important" male values. In their cavalier attitude, they are the opposite of Red Emma's Helen and Emma, both of whom are far too readily impressed by their comrades. Gallant makes obvious from the outset that her play mocks facile or muddled politics of all sorts, whether international, national, or personal. However, Gallant's distanced stance creates problems within the drama in terms of the female characters' motivation and the audience's ability to take them seriously. If all political aspirations portrayed in the play are either naive, suspect, or downright misguided, as Gallant consistently suggests, how is the audience to interpret the two young women's -- particularly the more naive Jenny's -- groping for personal growth and political truths?

Gallant's approach in What Is To Be Done? echoes Bolt's in Red Emma: she juxtaposes the young would-be activists' political romanticism with the jaundiced pragmatism of an older observer -- the dour Mrs. Bailey, who nevertheless practises her own misguided knitting of headgear more appropriate to the First World War. Not only does Mrs. Bailey disapprove of the silliness of Jenny and Molly, she is skeptical about Willie's grasp on the teachings of "the movement." She tells him that whoever forgot to make the movement's fourth rule -- "No personal feelings" -- the first, "ought to be shot" (24). In a caricature of anti-Romantic hardheadedness, Mrs. Bailey has no real use for sentimental feelings such as love because:

> Love isn't progress. It's in the natural order, but not in the natural movement. The natural movement goes . . well . . from religion to politics. That's a natural movement. Where's love? Before religion, if you like. To one side. A kind of by-pass. Somewhere. But not between. Not between religion and politics. For one thing, there's no room. (34)

Because the young people (even Willie, despite his doctrinaire spouting of Communist tenets) don't understand such distinctions, Mrs. Bailey knows they "will never be useful." She sees her role as trying "to hold things together. Keep trying. Keep trying" (35).

As Molly's and Jenny's conversations about their fathers show, however, the males of the older generation have not succeeded at "holding things together." Molly's Irish father, Mick McCormack, was "a real revolutionary" who allegedly died fighting for the Communist cause and left his family "destitute." Jenny's father, G.E. Thurstone, on the other hand, was a seedy remittance man who became a school inspector even though "he wasn't awfully good about passing exams." Unlike McCormack, Thurstone "just gradually vanished. Like an old photograph that's been left in a harsh light" (31). Molly's mother seems to be perpetually babysitting her grandson Charlie while Molly flits about; Jenny's mother has gone to be with her new husband, Mr. Herbert, who "plays golf in warm climates" (32).

Molly is the less conformist, more questioning, of the two young women. She is doing her husband's job while he's in the army and notes, "There's nothing to it." Well on her way to Mrs. Bailey's distrust of "love," Molly briskly deflates Jenny's wonderings about married sex:

> Once you know you'll wish you didn't. You'll long for the great days when you were only wondering. (32)

Furthermore, Molly is slightly more politically astute than Jenny. As the pair convenes for a New Year's Eve drink at the "Austro-Hungarian Friendship Club" -- actually a clandestine hangout for Nazi sympathizers -- Molly notes, "There must be gaps in Willie's instruction" (38). Jenny, on the other hand, says of the all-male club:

> It's working-class and it's European. Of course it's leftwing! What else could it be? (39)

And like Catherine in Waiting for the Parade, Molly is not a knee-jerk patriot who supports war unquestioningly. In fact, she asks Jenny, who works for The Beacon as a statistician in "Appraisements and Averages," if she can "work out why my husband enlisted" (21). While Jenny thinks God is, "George the Fifth. Of course," Molly is much more hard-headed. To her, He is a "farmer":

> A cunning old peasant who owns all the land in sight. We meet at fairs and make deals. I promise him this, he lets me have that
> He usually wins. (58)

A pragmatist beneath her airs, in Scene V (January, 1944) Molly has made a pact with God that if Duncan returns from the war, she will change "into whatever he imagined he married. . . I don't see how else it can work." But by June of the same year, her idealism has gone and she rejects the political games they all have been playing to no avail.

Jenny, on the other hand, needs to continue believing in the revolution and the myth of the new society that will follow after the war. Jenny, who senses her own inner emptiness, admits even the two "Soviet embassy apparatchiks" offered her a focus outside her self to hang on to, however uninspiring their performance. Jenny tells Molly:

> It doesn't matter. I don't care. What matters is what I felt when I believed. When I thought it was true. I've never been so happy. (59)

Molly, who grows increasingly impatient with Jenny's credulity, responds harshly:

> That's marriage. Now you know. (59)

Such a remark is very upsetting to Jenny, who desperately needs to believe that the "new future" will be better than her present drab life:

> You promised . . remember? That we'd be together. The three of us. You and Duncan and me. To build the new world. The only world worth living for . . you said. (59)

Despite her gullibility, Jenny is a sympathetic character because she strives to be different; her greatest fear is, "what if I never have anything else." Jenny does make efforts to better herself, and she does not succumb to Willie's courtship of her. But Gallant makes plain that Jenny's mistake is to accept others' analyses and solutions for her own, to look for courses and movements centred outside herself as a source of strength. While both funny and poignant, her half-hearted dabbling in courses such as

"Constructive Russian" and "Strategic Journalism," and her endless misguided attempts to interest Mr. Gillespie in her story ideas is wasted effort doomed to failure.

One of the play's most encouraging features for a feminist spectator/reader is its relentless undermining of Romanticism. War is not glorified; heroism is suspect; peace is unlikely to bring a perfect society; married life is relentlessly debunked as a solution to life's woes. Even Jenny, who is predisposed to be a believer, comes away from the ghastly date with Willie and Karl-Heinz realizing, "Mrs. Bailey was right" (87). Unlike the young Emma Goldman in Bolt's play, neither Molly nor Jenny end up embroiled in "men's affairs." Willie and Karl-Heinz may dismiss them as prudes and virgins -- "the natural daughters of Bakunin and Queen Victoria (89) -- but the two young women have not allowed themselves to become their comrades' sexual playthings, either. When Jenny and Willie finally consummate their relationship, Jenny is greatly disappointed by this area of Willie's "instruction":

> When it finally happened, I said to him, 'Is that all?' I said, 'You mean that was it?' I said, 'Are you sure there isn't some other thing we can do?' After all that wondering and trying to read the last paragraph of Duncan's letters. (105)

Gallant makes it quite clear that if transformation is to occur in a young woman's life, sexual ecstasy will not be the vehicle by which it arrives. In fact, Molly and Jenny's participation in the revolution has been a flop, Jenny admits:

> Molly and I never read 'What Is To Be Done?'. We never had the right language. I read some other things. In English. Like, 'The Role of

> Women in Revolution.' Actually, it isn't all that great a role. When he jumps out of the airplane, you hang around in a cornfield waiting to carry the parachute. (105)

However disillusioned she is, Jenny is still observing the society around her, still reacting to it. And her "story ideas" for Mr. Gillespie have ceased to be silly. Now she has a social conscience, even if he does not recognize it. Her last "tip" for him involves the injustice visited upon "delinquent Catholic" girls who are forced to work in a laundry and brutally treated. Jennie sees this as an unjust state of affairs, even if the laundry is where Mr. Gillespie's wife sends her museum-piece lace tablecloth:

> I'm only saying that I don't see why a girl who's been raped by her sister's husband's father's cousin has to wash, starch and iron St. Ursula and the Thousand Virgin Martyrs in order to cleanse society. (109)

And although Jenny promises her boss she will settle down to drab office conformity, "like a good girl," the consistent irony of the script undermines her pledge of "It won't happen again" (110), with open-ended possibilities for further transformation and change. What Jenny may indeed mean is that she won't again be so prone to naive illusions.

vi

Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days, which premièred March, 1983, at Winnipeg's Prairie Theatre Exchange, raises several questions crucial to feminist thought: should women be unanimous on all topics by virtue of their sex? is it wise to ally oneself with power sources in society to win even token acceptance of "women's issues"? how idealistic can women afford to be when fighting to change society's norms? Of the six plays discussed in this chapter, The Fighting Days provides the best example of a consistently feminist drama which clearly demonstrates that women's fullest self-definition comes through a combination of personal and political growth which enables them to take their places as fully autonomous individuals within society. Francis Beynon's journey from naive farm girl to compassionate, mature woman best exemplifies how a fully feminist heroine might conduct herself.

Kim McCaw, who directed the play's first production, says he was unprepared for the "overwhelming enthusiasm with which the show was received.''[66] McCaw says part of the play's popularity came from the community's readiness for drama "that took its story from the history of the place and made a statement that gave value to that history." But McCaw also believes the message of The Fighting Days is timely:

> In Francis Beynon, we have the portrait of an individual who has chosen to dedicate her life to the pursuit of freedom -- for herself, for women in her society and, ultimately, for all human beings. She was an idealist, a dreamer who saw great potential for the world and who risked everything in her attempts to realize some of the potential. (75)

He says audiences respond to Beynon's courage and integrity as she seeks "the gleam" of truth. Lill's decision to focus the play upon an heroic woman, one less well-known nationally than the outspoken

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[66] Kim McCaw in "Introduction" to "The Fighting Days" published in Canadian Theatre Review 42 (Spring 1985), 74.

Nellie McClung, is a form of positive and necessary historical "re-visionism," which reclaims an almost-forgotten woman from among history's footnotes and puts her centre stage. And eight years after the première of The Fighting Days, Lill's play functions as a sound feminist drama by virtue of its subject matter, the questions it raises about female choices, and its use of personal vignettes set against a background of public events. What is also admirable to a 1991 reader is that Lill's understanding of the principle at stake when Francis Beynon opposes Nellie McClung on the vote issue -- arguing that some women cannot be more equal than others by virtue of their ancestry -- is now more relevant than ever within a factionalized Canadian society.

As does Maggie & Pierre, The Fighting Days explores a young woman's getting of wisdom in both political and personal realms, and indeed, demonstrates that one cannot be separated from the other. The opening scene of Lill's play is set in 1910, and its events span a period of seven years during which Beynon grows from a naive eighteen-year-old farm girl to an articulate and independent-minded woman. To decide, as Francis does at age 26 (in an era when spinsters had virtually no status within society) to eschew romance and remain single in order to pursue her dreams, is the choice of a strong-willed woman. And unlike Gallant's Jenny in What Is To Be Done?, Francis does so out of a painfully won, fully developed political consciousness.

Both Francis and her older sister Lily have been raised by one of those formidable prairie pioneer fathers, a wrathful Methodist despot whose passing neither daughter especially mourns. Lily remarks that Francis's questions and her "undisciplined spirit" enraged their father, seeming to "bring out the worst in him" (8). In fact, her father's death "frees" Francis to join Lily in the city where she may visit tea rooms, go to libraries, and play cards. In addition, she joins Lily's "suffrage club" and embraces the Votes-For-Women movement. In short order, the formerly self-doubting prairie flower, who feared she would not "fit" into city life, talks herself into a job as women's editor with The Rural Review. Suddenly, Beynon is no longer the shy "Fanny" who boarded the train in the previous scene:

> Sir, I come from a farm and I am a woman. I know all about bedbugs and woodticks, runny eyes in chicks, cracked tits on milkers, cakes without eggs . . . and how to avoid the minister's visit. (23)

The newspaper is edited by George McNair, a Scottish-born chauvinist who makes pronouncements vaguely reminiscent of that bewigged, eighteenth-century wag, Dr. Samuel Johnson:

> It's always interesting to hear a woman speak in public. It's sort of like seeing a pony walking on its hind legs. Clever, even if not natural.(19)

Nevertheless, McNair seems relatively fair-minded when compared with other men of his era -- particularly if one recalls the politicians in What Glorious Times They Had. Throughout The Fighting Days, Lill uses McNair as a "mouthpiece" whose role is to espouse prevailing traditional sentiments about women's roles and duties. This is similar to Diane Grant's use of Sir Rodmond Roblin's reflections upon women's roles as set out in the Bible as a means to convey the era's attitudes towards women's role and responsibilities. Early in The Fighting Days, Nellie terms McNair a "wart on the nose of progress" (13). And indeed McNair is paternalistic: he describes Lily as "not a bad little writer," and he calls Francis "little Miss" (22). And as Francis begins to use her column as a forum for women's issues instead of just a space for household hints and recipes, it becomes clear McNair lives in the past, snuggled deep in the sheltering arms of a number of romantic myths about the nature of motherhood. He tells Francis:

> Scotch broth and shortbread and a garden full of bluebells make [life's injustices] a bit more tolerable. My mother knew that. She would never have bothered herself with voting and chasing men out of bars. (34)

However, Francis is skeptical of that idealized picture, asking McNair if his mother was happy -- to which her employer must reply, "I don't know. She seemed content. She smiled a lot." Francis interprets that to mean "she just put up with it" -- and later it becomes clear how unsatisfactory a solution this is to a woman of Francis's will.

Reactionary though he may seem, McNair is not a total buffoon; he is more politically astute than is Premier Roblin in What Glorious Times They Had. He notices, long before Francis can bear to admit it, that the suffrage club's membership includes only women with the proper "lineage," who have names like "Steward and Galbraith," but not Schapansky and Swartz" (36). Yet, at the same time, he sees Francis as "one of those little birds I found trapped in the house when I was a child. . . I could feel their little hearts beating in my hand." Although he views himself as a kind liberator who will set the little birds free, when it comes to Francis he cannot see that he would be the one to clip the bird's wings to keep her still within patriarchy's cage. One of the strengths of the scenes between McNair and Francis is that Lill always makes the newspaper editor a credible and well-intentioned man. He is kind-hearted and well-meaning in his tyranny, proferring an apparently "tender trap" which is, of course, the situation women without means often find difficult to resist. McNair has no idea when he presumes, oversteps his limits, or invades Francis's terrain; for instance, he asks to call upon her, then officiously informs her that "it might help your cause if you applied some rouge to your cheeks occasionally" (39). He has not understood Francis's impassioned expression of her feelings about suffrage:

> When I came to the city, I met women fighting for the freedom to think and worship and question for themselves. Women who challenge authority . . . who look it right in the eye and say, prove you're worthy of respect! I felt like I'd been let out of prison. I felt like a great gleam of sunlight had broken through the fog. And I didn't feel alone any more. (38)

However, even as McNair falls in love with Francis, knowing that she has "a vision of the world that's clearer than most," (82) he cannot overcome his own attitudes about "unwomanly" roles. Although he respects Francis's terrier tenacity, he does not resist the publisher's demand that she be fired over her anti-conscription stand. Lill intends McNair to represent those good, well-meaning men whose misplaced and outmoded chivalry smothers the same spark in a woman that initially lures them. Seeing a woman's salvation only in home and family, McNair offers Francis his solution to end the strife in her life:

> You're not a young girl any more. Francis, I love you. I want to marry you. I want to take care of you. I want you to stop worrying about what you can't change. Let me take care of you now. Don't say anything. Let me talk. I've saved enough money to buy a house. Leave the paper. You won't have to put up with any more abusive letters, you won't have to turn yourself inside out with issues. I know how it tortures you. Just let it all go. (91)

In his passion to "save" Francis, McNair is deaf to the heartfelt strength her simple rejoinder: "McNair, I love my job."

One of most appealing aspects of The Fighting Days is its depiction of female strength and organization in an era when neither was encouraged nor expected. Just as Diane Grant's What Glorious Times They Had shows the suffragist movement's spirit and mission, Lill conveys the vision and will which characterized early feminists' goal to elevate women's status from chattel to person. Not only do Lillian, Francis and Nellie work together, they play together; they have fun with each other and respect the companionship they share. In the early days of their association, both Nellie and Lily help Fanny answer readers' questions for her column. And even after feelings become inflamed over the conscription issue, Nellie still sees Lily off to New York with a package of biscuits to sustain her on the train journey.

Best of all, Lill romanticizes neither the fight for equality nor the personalities involved. She dares to make her women characters both complex and contradictory. In teaching Lily and

Francis an "interpretive dance" which is "naughty" and which she saw in London at the Palladium, Nellie shocks both sisters by asking if it "would be so terrible" to dislodge the child she is carrying. McClung wonders aloud:

> Well, I've had four already. How many does a modern woman need? My Jack is already 15. (30)

But although she can harbour advanced thoughts about pregnancy, Nellie is relentlessly fierce about McNair because "he drinks" (31). And for all her heroic wit and insight ("I'm a disturber. Disturbers are never popular." [18]), Nellie McClung turns out to be hidebound and bigoted when it comes to supporting the vote for "foreign women" in the 1917 federal election. Furthermore, to Francis's horror, she supports conscription in order to "win this wretched horrid war." (73) By dramatizing these conflicts, Lill demonstrates that women are not uniform generic types; they are not in political practice always "angels in the house." The Fighting Days illustrates that the ideal of unanimity can elude women (not really a "gentler" sex, as Francis and Nellie's rows attest) as well as men. Wisely, Lill does not make the mistake of presenting the suffragists as either female supremists or perfect beings.

As Francis moves from answering trivial household hints to espousing important political principles, McNair's interest in her grows apace with his alarm at her politics. In focusing on McNair's love for Francis, Lill dispels the "harpies and harridans" image often attached to the first wave of feminists, and she provides a foil for Francis's views, giving her a patriarchal symbol, a figure of "conventional wisdom," against whom to test her opinions. In some respects, because he is older than she, and somewhat of a curmudgeon, McNair provides the same point of resistance for Frances as did her father, with whom she contended frequently. To a modern audience, even McNair's warm heart cannot disguise his chilling views on women's rights. He is appalled by Francis's plans to don a Votes For Women sash and march down main street:

> A whole generation of women being turned upside down, turned into shrill opinionated harpies, when they should be at home, having lots of good strong children. (48)

That comment causes Francis to show McNair the door, but she is still attracted to him. Nevertheless at the suffrage march, she proclaims:

> Oh I am thankful to be living in these fighting days, when there are so many things waiting to be done, that we have no time to sit and feel sorry for ourselves, when Humanity is seething and boiling and stirring with a thousand conflicting interests . . . . And we women have just begun to dabble with our fingertips in this great eddying stream of life. (51)

This a heartfelt utterance reflects Francis's engagement with women's struggle for equality and her gusto for the life she pursues so determinedly.

However, as McNair has predicted, war -- men's business -- overtakes the fight for women's suffrage, and the issues become as muddied as the boots of the soldiers on the French battlefields. The first cause of contention is Lily's apparent enthusiasm for her first-aid courses in face of Francis's absolute abhorrence for the "pointless" antics of war. Francis is also appalled that Lily won't "stand up" for her husband Vernon, who is giving pacifist lectures around town. The sisters quarrel over the war:

> FRAN: . . .You've always fought for people's right to express themselves. The issue here is Freedom.
> LILY: But I thought it was freedom that we're fighting for over there? Well, whatever it is, there are millions of young men going out and fighting for it. How can they all be wrong?
> FRAN: But how can you ever be free by killing people or being afraid that someone's going to kill you? (57)

Even the hard-headed McNair, Francis finds, has succumbed to patriotism: were he younger, he says, he would fight, for the "freedom of my country." When Francis asks, "what does that really mean?" McNair puts it into terms of gender-based duties:

> Well, it means to protect our homes, our loved ones . . . our women. Men are supposed to sacrifice their lives for women. Haven't you noticed? (62)

But Francis feels betrayed both by events and herself as well, recalling her first column about the war, when she pledged that "we women will keep our Purpose clear -- true democracy -- and with our purpose transport our men, our country throughout the troubled waters of war" (63). In her idealism, Frances "saw Womanhood as some great unsinkable ship which would buoy up everyone," but now she finds her sense of purpose almost swamped by a towering wave of patriotism, fear and prejudice. Francis cannot accept Nellie's argument that the "only way to protect our traditions is to limit the vote to the Empire women," and asks how Nellie, if she "truly believe[s] in women," can turn her back on the foreign women just because they may not support conscription (72). Because Francis believes Nellie's alliance with Robert Borden is wrong, a "total contradiction," she writes an editorial saying so, only to be swamped with readers' objections.

The questions Lill raises about Francis -- is she "arrogant" as Lily charges, a "dreamer" as McNair claims, or a visionary -- are the sorts of questions history always raises about powerful reformers -- about heroic figures who have, in the past, all too often been men. By placing Francis at the vortex of such controversies, Lill takes her seriously as a historical figure and as a dramatic character. But Lill eschews didacticism and wisely does not answer the questions she poses, leaving the audience to ruminate on the clash between individual rights and common weal. Given her uncompromising position, it is no surprise that Francis is asked to resign, nor that she is finally unable to accept McNair's offer of a house and babies. Her rejection of McNair is obviously painful:

> I love your warmth. But I . . . (voice breaking) can't . . . do what you want. It would be too much like a closed hand. And I'd always be struggling to get free. Do you understand? (92)

Today, while many women do understand Francis's reasoning, others may still marry because they fear remaining single or they succumb to societal conditioning which posits marriage and motherhood as women's only gratifying role. An interesting experiment might be to present The Fighting Days to a high school audience, then ask how many of the students -- boys and girls -- feel Francis made the "right" choice.

The Fighting Days explores a number of sociological questions vital to the feminist struggle: must women sacrifice private happiness for public works? can women's solidarity weather power struggles and the pressures of the larger political realm? is it reasonable for women to expect, as did Maggie Trudeau, "to have it all?" Francis cannot afford to choose "romance," Lill suggests, because she is a quester who not only wishes to "advance the cause of women," but desires to erase "tyranny, war and intolerance." Those tasks, it today seems obvious, are still undone. In order to effect such far-reaching changes, society requires millions more Francis Beynons -- and we will need them to stay in Canada and not travel to New York to follow their "Gleam."

As the previous readings show, the clearer the playwright's analysis of women's history, the stronger her commitment to the creation of characters in whom are fused both personal and public growth and endeavor, the more soundly feminist a play she creates. In The Fighting Days, we find the epitome of a well-crafted feminist play which is founded firmly upon an understanding and analysis of women's place within history as well as a clear-eyed assessment of the obstacles standing in their path towards autonomy. The protagonist in such a play is transformed by her own will to understand her self and her world, and to better both.

Chapter III

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart/Tis woman's whole existence; man may range/The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the/Sword, gown gain, glory offer in exchange/Pride, fame, ambition to fill up his heart,/And few there are whom these cannot estrange;/Men have all these resources, we but one,/To love again, and be again undone"
--George Noel Gordon,
Lord Byron, Don Juan[67]

i

Strong women, women who respond to their situations in life with action -- sometimes passionate, sometimes befuddled -- rather than resigned passivity, are the focus of this chapter's study of six very different plays inhabited by diverse, powerful "heroines." This chapter's "cast" of characters is unforgettable: it includes an elderly individualist in Gwen Pharis Ringwood's The Lodge; a protean housewife in Beverley Simon's Crabdance; a fierce spinster in Sharon Pollock's Blood Relations; determined writers in Margaret Hollingsworth's War Babies and Pamela Boyd's Inside Out; and a headstrong poet in Wendy Lill's Memories of You. Unlike Byron's Julia, these characters have not accepted wholly the Romantic myth about women's sphere; they do not regard "love" as their whole existence. In fact, they know, perhaps intuitively, that to do so is to effect a kind of living death upon their psyches. But they are also immured within a society where family duties have long been enshrined as woman's finest role in life. Shaping all of these plays, we find playwrights who appear to be aware of the struggle women face when they attempt to pursue personal interests within the mesh of a family relationship, who understand that women may be restless in the grip of domestic bonds, who recognize that life lived to serve others only may lack self-gratification or satisfaction. These are playwrights who realize that, even if biology is not destiny, gender certainly shapes a woman's life in terms of the expectations society places upon her. And each of these plays comments -- either overtly or subtly -- upon the loss of freedom which frequently occurs once a woman becomes implicated within the sphere of home and family. This chapter's playwrights frequently create characters engaged in some sort of juggling act: they try to do their best for their families yet also seek to retain something of their own autonomy. Some of them are more successful than others in this act (Sadie in Beverley Simons's Crabdance); some of them conduct it at great cost to their own careers (Ellen in Pam Boyd's Inside Out); others may resort to violence to liberate themselves from domesticity's circumscribed world (Lizzie in Sharon Pollock's Blood Relations); and yet others may find that the demands of family life disrupt forever their careers (Elizabeth in Wendy Lill's Memories of You; Esme in War Babies).

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[67] George Noel Gordon, Lord Byron, "Don Juan" in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Third Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), p. 418.

One can go back 20 years and find playwrights attempting to sort out the conflict between a woman's duty to her private life and her desire to play a public role in the world around her, the clash between self-expression and self-sacrifice. In Gwen Paris Ringwood's The Lodge[68], a hard-headed older woman is the play's moral centre and the role model for her granddaughter Shelley, who is struggling not to lose herself within marriage. Written in the early 1970's, the play has stood up very well to the passage of two decades. Its concern with man's invasion of the wilderness, and the accompanying destruction of forest and resultant pollution problems, is certainly as topical today as when Ringwood wrote the play. And although she sugar-coats her message with humour, the playwright also makes valid critical points about female autonomy that were, in fact, ahead of their time when first written. To the still-relevant concerns of pollution and feminism, Ringwood adds a third focus -- native rights -- which remains an issue of great concern to Canadians. Ringwood's handling of these topics, which were perhaps deemed to be of "marginal" interest in the early seventies, brings to centre stage issues which some forces within mainstream society would now still like to relegate to the "fringes" of people's attention.

In Jasmine Daravalley, whose "real" name is Lydia ("I never did feel like a Lydia" [456]), Ringwood creates an elderly female "hero" who is repressed neither by familial nor societal expectations. In fact, Jasmine seems to find aging liberating: it enables her to spurn accepted behavior with even greater impunity. In a clever generational role-reversal, Jasmine outrages her conventional, materialistic daughter Alice, who does not have any understanding of her mother's psyche or values. Alice wants to control Jasmine by incarcerating her in "Silver Threads" nursing home where she can "keep an eye on her" (439). Alice's pharmacist husband Eardley, although he understands Jasmine better than her daughter does, is equally materialistic ("when I percolate, it usually means Profit"), wishing to subdivide the family's beloved High Valley Ranch.

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[68] Gwen Pharis Ringwood, "The Lodge," The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1982), pp. 437-488.

As the couples of two generations -- Jasmine's two daughters and their husbands (Alice and Eardley and Major Roland Anderson and his wife Connie), and her granddaughter Shelley and her husband Allan Marsden -- await Jasmine's arrival for her birthday party at Wilderness Lodge, Ringwood sets up the conflict between them as a foil for "the spinny old lady with a paint box" (440). Allan and Shelley are arguing over whether to accept a booking from "seven hunters at a thousand a week each" (440), a booking Allan wants for practical reasons, and Shelley doesn't for idealistic ones, preferring instead the "militant" Council of Indian Bands. But the conflict between the younger couple runs deeper, and we see evidence of it in Allan's criticisms of his wife's batik art:

> Allan: Shelley doesn't look carefully at things. Like those horses.
> Shelley: What's wrong with my horses?
> Allan: Their legs look broken. Horses' legs aren't made that way . . . . You don't look at things. Who ever saw a horse with front legs like that? (441)

As Shelley notes, "Allan just doesn't see things my way at all." What's even worse, from Shelley's perspective, is that Allan seems to think that Shelley's art is a "hobby." Alice disapproves of women who do not "settle" and become immersed in their domestic duties. She says:

> Mother sacrificed her family life for her painting, Shelley. Painting was never a little hobby with her. It was everything. Now I'm different. I studied the piano, but I never let myself get too involved. (443).

Here we see the childhood-based resentment of a daughter who has never granted her mother the right to any autonomy beyond hearth and home. Jasmine, of course, does "get involved," and her exuberant pursuit of her commitments has not abated with increased age -- quite the contrary.

Ringwood is adept at exploring the various permutations of family conflict at Wilderness Lodge. Added to the mix is the gap in values between Shelley and her Uncle Roland, a military man and "fearless hunter" constantly at odds with his bird-watching wife Connie, who in turn is at odds with her sister Alice. In fact, white, middle-class family life is not seen as offering its members harmony or peace. There is a clear dichotomy set out in the play between those with traditional values who regard themselves as the "normal" ones -- Alice, Connie, Eardley and Roland -- and those who do not conform to their values. Into the latter category fall Robin, Shelley's cousin who is working as a potter in Mexico; Marybelle, a well-educated Indian counsellor and Chief's granddaughter whom Alice patronizes, Jasmine, Jimmy Lashaway and, of course, the wilderness itself and High Valley ranch as a symbol of all that is untouched and "uncivilized."

Jasmine's appearance is both a relief and a tonic in the midst of all this familial tension. By her poncho, her homemade yoga mat cut from an oriental rug, and her admission that she hitchhiked to the lodge, it is immediately evident she is not the usual blue-rinse grandma. Jasmine further infuriates Alice, who simultaneously patronizes and attempts to make her mother feel guilty ("I'm out of my mind with worry") by admitting she stopped to sketch:

> I don't feel exhausted, Alice. I did some sketches at the river -- the old bridge. Such color. I was full of excitement . . . (455)

When she dispassionately reports the fire that destroyed her apartment, her paintings, and "the odds and ends and scraps and pieces of a life time," it becomes evident how out of touch Jasmine is with her daughters' values:

> Alice: The silver. The cloisonne. The Limoges.
> Connie: You had priceless books. Some original Audubons. The French doll.
> Jasmine: All the fire department could do was keep the fire from the other houses. And nobody died. (457)

Although the loss of everything has been a shock for Jasmine, she finds liberation in the disaster:

> . . . I did feel lost. Without my things. Things can be like a cocoon around you. Make you feel safe. Then all of a sudden I realized that I'm free. . . free to find a new shape, or to fill up the one I'm supposed to have. I don't have to live in my things any more. I can just live. (458)

Jasmine has sent shares of the insurance money to her children to bring them together at the lodge because she has visions of sharing with them, of "reaching out, starting over," not, as Alice misapprehends, because she feels homeless or alone.

Jasmine goes with Jimmy Lashaway to the "strange" Soda Springs, where she once went with her late husband Edward, to put herself in touch with something she senses she has lost, and also to help her decide how to dispose of the 160-acre plot of land upon which the spring is located. The spring, of course, is a symbol within the play, a source of the land's strength and mystery, untouched and self-renewing -- the antithesis of the rapacious world represented by Eardley. Jasmine finds its warmth feels "like touching the heart of the earth" (462). And it is a mystical place to the Indians: it has made Marybelle "proud again, like when she was little," Jimmy tells Jasmine. He knows that the spring cannot be "owned," nor can the ground it surges from.

A crucial scene in The Lodge occurs at the spring between Jasmine and Shelley, who in many ways are soulmates. The scene highlights many of the conflicts facing women who would like to have an identity beyond the domestic sphere, yet who feel seduced by the myths of that same sphere. Shelley is the epitome of a young woman groping to combine both a private role as a wife and mother with a more public role as an aspiring artist, and she is not handling the "juggling" act well as she strives to integrate the two parts of her life. Jasmine senses the pregnant Shelley's unrest, and the young woman confesses:

> When I first came out here I was sure it was
> the right place for us. But now sometimes I

> feel trapped. I don't seem to be able to be a wife and a person too. And I think all Allan wants is a wife. It's a silly word -- wife. I don't like it. Allan makes fun of my work -- my sketches and batiks. He thinks of them the same way he thinks of his mother's crocheted doilies. I just feel . . .trapped, that's all. (464)

Shelley realizes that when she was with Robin, who adulated her, she "felt like a tyrant." But now, with Allan, "I feel like a bondswoman." She has become pregnant without telling her husband because "it's my body," but also perhaps because she thinks a baby -- an external entity -- will bring her the inner peace she craves. Although the scene is intense, it is not sentimental. When Shelley wails, "What'll I do, Grandma?" Jasmine answers honestly: "Shelley, dear, I don't know." Jasmine, for all her daughters' views of her as a free-spirited and self-centred person, is still searching for answers, too. Ringwood is honest and astute enough not to condemn Jasmine to yet another stereoytpe for the aged -- that of the omniscient matriarch so beloved of television soap operas.

Ringwood is also careful not to create only stereotypic male characters. Although Jasmine's two sons-in-law each represent a particular male stereotype -- Roland is chastened in his role as great white hunter when he misses a "clean kill" on the cougar, and Eardley is deprived of the chance to implement "stately pleasure domes" in his tacky vision of a recreational paradise -- Allan is a complex personality who does "change" during the course of the play. Although Allan seems an unsympathetic character at the play's outset, he proves himself capable of adaptation. And, to be fair to him, he is often treated dismissively by Shelley, particularly when she, in an immature choice, becomes pregnant without telling him. When he finds out, he says:

> Good God. We must be far apart for you to get pregnant without even telling me. . . . I'm not ready. Anyway, how could I conceive a child and not know? How can something that important happen to you without your knowing? (473)

Although Shelley does not seem to give him much credit for it, Allan has his own way of doing things; he wants the Lodge to be better established before they have children; he wants to be "worthy" of parenthood before it happens to them. But because Shelley, as Jasmine tells her, "doesn't listen," she does not know his feelings. And Shelley is always ready to think the worst of her husband. When the cougar is killed, she blames him without knowing the circumstances. In so doing, Shelley is guilty of relegating men to specific roles. As Allan puts it, she wants:

> to push me into some role . . . the destroyer, the killer. . . . Not just the cougar. Everything. As if I were out to trap you. I'm not. If you really think of me as some bloody-minded Cain, then you'd better leave me. I may not draw or paint or make pots . . . but I can like those things . . . . (484)

That statement might be addressed directly to certain radical feminists who tend to valorize female nature and assign the worst of qualities to males. Ringwood uses the character of Allan to delineate and challenge gender stereotypes, showing they can cripple men as well as women. And rather than paint women as blameless in such matters, she illustrates how they, too, can dismiss others' complexities when they refuse to see the "whole" person. Just as Alice sees Marybelle as Other, as Indian, so Shelley sees Allan as Other, as Husband -- even while she is objecting to being constrained by the role/word Wife herself.

Overall then, even though she has written a conventionally linear play, Ringwood may be identified as a modern liberal feminist playwright because of the type of issues she addresses in The Lodge. She has explored societal expectations of women's roles in the "typical" family, illustrating both a young woman's and an old woman's needs to maintain their autonomy. Although Jasmine has done very well at pursuing her "public" role as an adventurer and an artist, Alice's comments show that children can resent such independence. (Rose's anger at Elizabeth gives further proof of such resentment in Memories of You.) Shelley, on the other hand, carries the idea of independence so far that she makes an unfair, unilateral decision to become pregnant. Ringwood also poses questions about the nature of a society which posits male roles as either the businessman and material provider (Eardley) or the hunter and defender (Roland). She suggests that it is time for human beings to give up the dynamics of control and aggression and learn to better live in harmony with the surrounding natural world. And in creating a sympathetic male character who can allow himself to change some of his attitudes when they are challenged, Ringwood hints of the possibility of a new brand of harmony between men and women in a more integrated society where control of others is not necessary, where brute force is not mistaken for strength. In Jasmine's final speech to her family, when she informs them that she has disposed of High Valley Ranch by donating it to the government as a heritage property and is giving Soda Springs back to Jimmy and Marybelle's band, she thwarts the forces of self-interest and destruction. And in announcing she is off to Australia to "teach and study Maori Art," Jasmine reassserts her autonomy and foils all of Alice's patronizing schemes. (One must forgive Jasmine's placing of Maoris in Australia rather than in New Zealand as a research slip on the playwright's part, not a sign of her character's senility.)

ii

Rediscovering Beverley Simons's Crabdance[69] twenty-two years after its first production reaffirms the play's power as a text which both enacts and comments upon women's roles within society. Materialist-feminist thought had not been articulated as a distinct philosophy in 1972 when Crabdance made its Canadian première at the Vancouver Playhouse, but its tenets can be discerned in Simons's play now.[70] The immensely organized, hugely female, disturbingly protean, but nevertheless mortal Sadie Golden is possibly more integral to a study of feminist drama today than ever before. Simon's concerted critique of human interaction as yet another commodity in a mechanistic, materialistic world is leavened by the brisk, sardonic humor of a middle-aged woman who swings effortlessly from blatant manipulation to arch scheming while making brisk trips to and from the kitchen. By bringing the male (public) world into her female (private) realm, Sadie is able to challenge stereotypes about both. And undercutting the action on stage is the play's inherent irony, which allows the characters' language to resonate with sub-textual meaning and double entendre. Simons's resolute use of a domestic setting to poke, prod and ridicule accepted stereotypes about female domesticity and male territorialism is assured and relentless, as is her powerful exploration of the nature of a woman's being, including such forces as lust and acquisitiveness. And although Sadie's hurried preparation of "chocolate cookies, meat balls, rice balls, chicken soup . . ." (15) turns out to be the arranging of her own funeral meats, the ultimate relentlessness of Simons's play is carefully offset by the sculptured energy of its satire.

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[69] Beverley Simons, Crabdance, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976), p. 7.

[70] Crabdance was first performed on Sept. 16, 1969 at A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle, Washington, under the direction of Malcolm Black, and did not find a place on a Canadian stage until three years later.

A play which has been infrequently produced over the past two decades, Crabdance contains one of the most vivid female characters in Canadian theatre. The multi-faceted Sadie ruthlessly challenges audience stereotypes about women: neither always a victim nor constantly an aggressor, she orchestrates the action in her house and yet she is also affected by it. When Sadie, mocking the function of a director in a melodrama, sets up her male visitors/characters to be her pawns, she initially seems omnipotent, revelling in her power. Yet her humanity implicates her in the very drama she creates. And because the role she plays is

Woman, the ending is all the more freighted with overtones of entrapment. While Sadie's "take-charge" demeanor is amusing and energizing, Simons also undercuts it with a sense of its sadness and desperation which builds to the play's climax.

From the first scene of the play, Simons makes clear that there is more to Sadie than meets the eye -- even if her apparently surreal setting and absurdist schemes are not immediately understandable. The playwright's stage directions posit a number of distinctive set features:

> free-standing stairs end abruptly in space above the set. . . . The stage front represents a plate glass window. . . . The furniture is shrouded in cowl-like sheets. . . A large, blue china cat with an enormous belly filled with Sadie's savings stands in a conspicuous position on the floor . . . . (13-14)

These instructions suggest Simons is mischievously bent on a path of defamiliarization: this looks like the setting for another domestic melodrama, but Crabdance uses conventions, both of society and of stage, to overturn expectations while simultaneously commenting upon them. As Simons says, "the effect should be curiously disturbing" (13).

And Sadie herself "emanates a strange combination of vulnerability and threat, naiveté and cunning" (14). Even as she enters into a dialogue with God, it is clear she is no typical middle-aged supplicant:

> Listen, you can't kid me about making woman out of man's ribs. You wouldn't change your mind about how to do things right off the bat. I mean, God doesn't make mistakes. First shot, bango, right on target. So why ribs first

> and then wombs? Man springs from woman, it's in your book. Come on, you can tell me. Nobody's listening. It's a coverup, right? You don't want us to know you had a bit of pleasure with the first woman. You shouldn't be ashamed, Immaculate Conception. Pheh! That must have been some fight before you got her down. (With appreciation.) Or maybe you haven't told because you don't want the other women, me, to take a real look at what we're left with. . . Mortal lovers. (14)

Not only does Sadie challenge the authority of the Father at its highest reaches, she refutes the Biblical explanation for woman's creation. In so doing, she invests God with the same desires as the creatures he has created -- much as the Greek gods and goddesses had the same lusts and foibles as their human worshippers. No docile daughter, this. Sadie is perhaps English-Canadian drama's earliest example of a radical-feminist character. She seems impressed by neither man nor deity, and continues what is obviously a well-established pattern of shaping her own version of events, acting as her own Creator of her own World.

As the overt sexuality of Sadie's opening speech suggests, Simons here wishes to acknowledge and explore the innate power of female desire -- which has long been distorted as evil or discounted as insignificant by patriarchal society -- and the permutations of human interchange such a potent force sets in action. Initially, Sadie appears as a consuming image of domesticity: she is "mother" to the insecure, naive Leonard Mowchuck, "lover" to the pompous, aging Dickens and both sexual partner and potential victim of the unscrupulous, slick Jack Hightower. Sadie's role-playing challenges the audience to examine the complicity in male-female sexuality, noting that sometimes positive sexual symbiosis can turn into exploitation or parasitism if a power imbalance develops between the two "organisms." And, occasionally a martyr (another of Woman's timeworn roles), Sadie seems to need to continue the fiction of a querulous husband whose "demands" are "getting worse" (49). Her mission is to pull together all the strands of the drama she weaves, to achieve the effect she wishes -- an ironic performance (expose) of the texture of her own life. Part of the absurdism of the play derives from Sadie's manic movement from one orchestrated scenario to another, as she summarily shifts her characters/visitors about the stage, none of them quite clear on the direction the "plot" is taking. And Sadie expects her visitors to throw themselves into the "act": "You've g[illegible] no play in you," she tells Mowchuk disgustedly towards the end of Act Three, when he will not follow her "script."

But for all her willingness to "play" out the absurdity of her woman's life, Sadie is a realist. She understands how society regards a woman in her fifties:

> They're my two white sacs, no, collapsed globes, maps of blue veins and white stretch lines, meaning nothing until they . . . yes, starting, swell and fill, full. . . Then whole worlds can be read on them. My nipples corks of fire. . . Burn! I want to hurt. The pain pleasures me. MILK! (16)

She is aware of the power of female fecundity, and how older women are reviled once the reproductive phase of their life is over. Yet, as much as "ageism" seems to anger her, Sadie shows that she is a victim of society's biases when she succumbs to disgust at her aging hands, wondering if she should pour tea wearing gloves so her guests won't "know how hard I've worked for them" (17). Such shifts between self-confidence and vulnerability, between belligerence and martyrdom, occur throughout the play (just as Simons's stage directions dictate). As a result, the character known as Sadie is constantly fascinating even as she comments obliquely upon the fragility of the female sense of self.

Seen through the eyes of the female "director," the male characters are static and largely unidimensional, limited by the roles Sadie has assigned them, by their own weakness (Mowchuk), by their own stodginess (Dickens), by their own rapacity (Highrise). Next to Sadie, they are caricatures. Simons thus reverses the "casting," as it were, assigning the passive role to the men, the active one to the female character, who is at once director and leading lady of her own "production." These techniques place Crabdance within the realm of metadrama: not only does Sadie create plays within the play in her varied scenarios, but she also assigns her visitors additional roles to illustrate a point she wishes to make, to advance her life-drama. In addition, as events are staged as a metaphor of life, Simon draws the audience into Sadie's world while simultaneously commenting upon that world. Such metadramatic techniques move Crabdance well beyond simple representation, into political commentary. As Sadie is orchestrating her drama, the audience is being acted upon by two events: first, the metadramatic techniques challenge every expectation about what is being represented; second, since each audience member has his or her inherent "subtext," drawn from personal experience, about what is being said about women's lives, each will be drawn into the drama in varying degrees, depending on the reactions to Simon's satire.

The emphasis upon absurdist artifice in Crabdance, as evident in the draped furniture (which includes Sadie's coffin), the stairs which lead nowhere, the interjection of Sadie's ironic songs, the sporadic posing with her "guests" as if for family photographs, the series of "plays within the play" culminating in Highrise's abandonment of Sadie in the role of "mayor's daughter," all conspire to add to the subversive nature of the play's critique of society as it is now ordered. The increasing infantilization of the male characters in Act Three is combined with the men's realization of Sadie's power. Of the three male characters, Highrise is the most aware of the nature of the game:

> None of them make me work like her. . . . That's what attracts me. It's talons against talons with us. If we draw blood all the better. Some of them go down like moths in a bottle of formaldehyde, and that's a bore. But the old bitch is taking over. Sometimes when I'm doing things, I'm not sure whether it's for me or so I can tell her. Or if I've done them at all. (110)

If this is read as a battle "between the sexes," it represents equal recognition of Sadie's power and of male resentment. One is reminded of both Sam's furious impotence in Jessica and Big Joey's hatred of women in Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing. But in the final scene, it is clear that Highrise, Dickens, and Mowchuk are in competition for Sadie's attention as a "Customer" (112). This scene suggests a number of complex interpretations of the basic trade in goods and services at the heart of many relationships in a capitalistic society. The men need Sadie to need them as a validation of their maleness; Sadie needs their visitations to confirm her female appeal and to exercise her power; yet the dependency entraps all of them: Sadie and the men alike. However, Simons seems to suggest that even though Sadie is enmeshed in a symbiotic relationship, hers is the stronger position: she is the buyer, she calls the shots. In fact, the men sometimes find that her demands are debilitating and humiliating. An example of Sadie's relentlessness is found in the "peacock mating dance," which culminates in a sexual act that "exhausts" Highrise (113), suggesting his penis does not really live up to its master's name. This scene certainly seems to confirm male fears about female sexual insatiability, yet it also subtly mocks the compulsion to measure human selfhood (male or female) by sexual performance. And the ironic tone of Sadie's descriptions of her own sexual self shows she sees her own desire as a trap at times.

Once she has all the men in "varying positions of childlike vulnerability," Sadie confesses how difficult her struggle has been, admitting "you don't know what a temptation helplessness is to a woman." She is commenting on male, not female, helplessness. Yet despite her puckish gamesmanship, Sadie contains within her character elements of tragedy because of the way her sex has circumscribed her life's "adventures." Because she has been at the mercy of rules set by men, she has had to develop a resourceful nature for which now she is reviled by the likes of Highrise.

Sadie's final speech is a cri de coeur against her lifelong struggle to maintain an identity, and the feelings of "invisibility" she suffered when her husband ceased to find her sexually attractive. She hints of an alternative which would offer women a better sort of community, one based on female solidarity, perhaps even (as many radical feminists advocate) a matriarchy:

> You think it's just me standing here? I have friends and relatives. While they are alive, wherever they are, so am I. We should be like the tribes in Africa. They all live under one roof. On the mother's side, I read it somewhere." (117)

And as the play draws to a close, it is clear that although Sadie's three o'clock soirée is the self-orchestrated acceptance of her own death, she will not depart quietly: active to the end, she must control her passing. She rejects the implications of her final "song," with its passive assertion that, "It's all for love that you must die/Sang the wise jackdaw" (120). With this rejection, she spurns the overriding lie of Romantic myths that have too long influenced Western women's roles. Perhaps Sadie can be read as an model subversive for womankind: protean but mortal, powerful but still vulnerable. Above all, she is exuberantly radical, active rather than passive as she makes public the bittersweet production that has been her life.

Whether she meant to or not, Beverley Simons created a convincingly radical feminist character in Sadie. In Crabdance we find a play based upon a materialist feminist critique but inhabited by a marvellously protean character who can be both radical feminist and earth mother. Nevertheless, Sadie is a viable and engaging character who, although entrapped in the private (housewife's) role for her entire life, refuses to be so limited and goes public (as a director) making of that life a public spectacle which in turn makes a poliitical statement about women's lives in general. Simons conveys her message in a highly theatrical manner, using humour, defamiliarization techniques and even a satiric deployment of miniature "play-within-the-play" scenes. Most of all, Sadie's ironic insights allow her to see that although she orchestrates the events within her own home, in the larger world she is relatively powerless, and that her commodities -- fecundity and sexual allure -- have a limited shelf life. This accurate materialist feminist assessment of women's position within male dominated, capitalist society is marvellously offset by Sadie's radical wackiness: she understands the way things work, but that does not mean she will go along with the game passively.

iii

To date, no character created by a Canadian playwright rejects passivity with the politicized intensity of Sharon Pollock's Lizzie Borden in Blood Relations.[71] Based on the factual-case-made-myth of the axe-murders of Mr. and Mrs. Borden in 1892, of which their daughter Lizzie was acquitted, Pollock creates in Blood Relations a metadrama even more complex and layered than Beverley Simons delivers in Crabdance. Pollock's stage directions in the Methuen 1984 version of Blood Relations make clear that the play exists on two levels of psychological awareness or "reality":

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[71] Sharon Pollock, Blood Relations in Plays by Women, Volume 3, selected and edited by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen Theatrefile, 1984), pp.92-124.

> The time proper is late Sunday afternoon and evening, late autumn, in Fall River, 1902; the year of the 'dream thesis', if one might call it that, is 1892. . . .
> Action must be free-flowing. There can be no division of the script into scenes by blackout, movement of furniture, or sets. There may be freezes of some characters while other scenes are being played. There is no necessity to 'get people off' and 'on' again for, with the exception of THE ACTRESS and MISS LIZZIE (and EMMA in the final scene), all characters are imaginary, and all action in reality would be taking place between MISS LIZZIE and THE ACTRESS in the dining-room and parlour of her home. (92)

The particularity of the playwright's directions signal very clearly that the integral "re-enactment" within the play is crucial to the play's multi-layered political message. To understand the play fully, the audience must accept both a transformation of chronological reality and a role reversal between the two characters, a reversal which throws into question ideas of both guilt and complicity on both private and public levels.

Pollock's brilliantly orchestrated structuring of Blood Relations forces the audience to judge the "fiction" of a genteel woman's life against the brutal realities of the bitterness and dependency such a role can create. The members of the audience must confront the idea of "truth" by watching the play and must grapple with the "evidence" and their own attitudes in order to decide which version of events they will believe -- the historical fact that Miss Lizzie has been acquitted and therefore must be "innocent," or the suggestive scenes of the play within the play, which clearly point to Lizzie's guilt, provoked by the inequities of her unbearable family situation. And if Lizzie is actually "guilty," and yet is now "free," what does this say about the condition of order within society? In her Methuen Afterword, Pollock observes that she began writing of Lizzie's story in 1972 as a straightforward "naturalistic play which purported to concern itself with who had done it. When I finished I discovered I didn't care who had done it." So Pollock was forced to rewrite, an act which not only changed her own work, but which threw into question popular myth about the nature of the daughter turned murderess. Pollock became fascinated with the ambiguity (did or didn't she?) Lizzie's story sets in motion:

> I began to play with a device that I hoped would do two things: maintain the ambiguity; and play upon the nature of theatre itself. Observers, the audience, observing and participating as an audience in the action of an actress playing Miss Lizzie playing Bridget observing an actress playing the Actress playing Lizzie -- multi-level interaction occurring between characters and enriched by the audience's varying perceptions and awareness of it. (123)

The effect of such attenuated metadrama defamiliarizes the audience's perceptions about how society -- and theatre itself -- actually is. Even more than Crabdance, Blood Relations forces a political critique of the very organization being portrayed. The Actress/Lizzie is constantly satirizing society in her role and by her disrespect for the role assigned to women. And when the mistress of the house, Miss Lizzie, becomes Bridget, the maid who serves her, and must have her own opinion about her mistress's guilt, a political point is made about how the class structure separates women even as the role-doubling posits the possibility of identification between women. This doubling suggesting solidarity is reminiscent of techniques used in What Glorious Times They Had. Furthermore, with respect to the play's content, Pollock writes that a former marriage to a violent man taught her that:

> I would have killed to maintain my sense of self, to prevent a violation that was far more frightening and threatening than any blow, and of which physical violence against my person was only the outward manifestation. (124)

The same situation of extremis, Pollock concludes, applies to Lizzie (as played by the Actress), who must defend against the endless control of her behavior and her very self by society's strictures -- particularly as initiated by her stepmother -- against her free thought and movement. Pushed and stifled and pushed again, Lizzie plausibly might take drastic, horrific action to carve, as it were, herself some psychic space in the world. And so it is that, when in the final moments of the play the Actress concludes, "Lizzie. Lizzie, you did," the audience understands perfectly what Miss Lizzie means when she retaliates with, "I didn't. You did" (122).

By exploring the social situation in 1892, when the axe murders occurred, from the perspective of a decade later, Pollock allows her narrative as well as her actors a sense of "doubling." The stage directions further clarify Pollock's intentions in this respect:

> While Miss LIzzie exits and enters with her Bridget business, she is a presence, often observing unobtrusively when as Bridget she takes no part in the action. (92)

While Miss Lizzie's guest, the Actress, re-enacts Lizzie's past, and Miss Lizzie herself plays the role of her own maid, several theatrical and natural stereotypes are shattered: the unity of time and place is cast aside; the separation between Mistress and Maid is collapsed, and the Inquisitioner/Voyeur (a role represented by both the Actress and the Audience) position is undermined. The entire "playing" with reality/identity forces inquiry into assumptions about Lizzie's guilt or innocence, but also into the inequities which so relentlessly have limited Miss Lizzie's options and may have shaped her behavior to such horrific ends. One can even see the split in the persona of Lizzie Borden between the public, well-behaved spinster, Miss Lizzie, and the private, defiant daughter Lizzie, provoked unto murder. Pollock clearly shows the damage such a schism may force upon a personality as a subtle means of arguing for a society which allows women to integrate both public and private selves.

Miss Lizzie's essential unknowabilty, the enigma of her past, is offset by her seeming ordinariness a decade after her trial -- a contradiction which lures both her lover, the Actress, and the audience, just as the audience/Henry in Maggie and Pierre has been lured into serving as voyeur in the love affair between Pierre Trudeau and Margaret Sinclair. The "not knowing" sparks both prurience and attraction, and Lizzie is clever enough to see her own appeal:

> MISS LIZZIE: You look like me, or how I think I look, or how I ought to look . . . Sometimes you think like me. . . do you feel that?
> ACTRESS: Sometimes.
> MISS LIZZIE: (triumphant): You shouldn't have to ask then. You should know. 'Did I, didn't I.' You tell me. (96)

What Pollock carefully elicits here is an awareness of narcissism, of the one character feeding off the other, of the mutual need, in a sense, to inhabit each other, to pursue a relationship based partly on symbiosis, partly on parasitism.

Miss Lizzie notes the actress is, "soaking up the ambience," which will serve her in a future role -- in fact in the immediate future when she "plays" Lizzie. But the Actress is also insightful about Miss Lizzie: she rightly observes that she knows full well the "certain fascination in the ambiguity," and astutely adds:

> You always paint the background but leave the rest to my imagination. Did Lizzie Borden take an axe? If you didn't I should be disappointed . . . and if you did I should be horrified. (96)

When Miss Lizzie responds, "which is worse?", the Actress admits she doesn't know which of the two choices -- "to have murdered one's parents, or to be a pretentious small-town spinster" -- is worse. This exchange seems to nicely encapsulate the two extreme "no-win" situations facing Lizzie and women like her, who are trapped within a certain role in society, and how high is the price paid for either choice.

Of course, Miss Lizzie does know the answer to her own question: far worse to be powerless at age 34 (or 44), to be a spinster existing on suffrance and grudging charity than to have taken responsibility for oneself. The play suggests that the price she must pay now, at age 44, is living with the speculation and her own conscience. Her only other option, to marry widower Johnny MacLeod, she rejects as yet another form of servitude, telling her father that the man "is looking for a housekeeper and it isn't going to be me." What Lizzie wants is her own life, but her father, a weak man who does not love his daughters enough to oppose his second wife on their behalf, will neither give her a job in his office nor give her money. Even though her stepmother says Lizzie is "crazy," for not conforming by accepting MacLeod's visits, Lizzie does not relent:

> There's something you don't understand, Papa. You can't make me do one thing that I don't want to do. I'm going to keep on doing just what I want just when I want -- like always! (107)

When Lizzie (that is, the Actress/Audience) becomes aware of Harry's scheme with Mr. Borden to take over the farm that rightfully belongs to the two sisters, her last illusion of "options" dies.

Pollock's portrayal in Blood Relations of women complicit in women's oppression is interesting. Emma, of course, represents the conventional, conforming sister/daughter, who does not agree with Lizzie that they are "individual people, and we have to live separate lives, and his will should make it possible for us to do that." Emma's response is one of passivity and resignation: "we can't change a thing" (113). It is clear in her conversations with Dr. Patrick that as The Actress/Lizzie becomes clearer about her lack of freedom, her heart hardens: she begins to believe "that stupid cow," her stepmother, has no right to live. Lizzie tells Patrick, "I've lived all my life for this one moment of clarity" (117). Once Lizzie has realized, "My life is precious," there is no path left but to fight her oppressors for her life. As if she were modelling how a woman should resolve a problem such as Lizzie's, the Actress plays Lizzie as a "woman of decision" (118), who has "it all figured out." The political message is strong: women must assume responsibility for themselves and act to free themselves; passivity will only further enslave them. Of the "stupid cow," Pollock tells us little. Mrs. Borden seems to function within the play as a vehicle of malicious control and cold-hearted materialism. A modern feminist would identify her as the "typical co-opted woman" who has adopted the patriarchy's attitudes about women as well as its tactics of controlling them. Such women cannot shape their own power because they lack insight and autonomy; instead, they derive power through association. Thus, as Mrs. Borden siphons her power off her husband, she cannot tolerate any one who would upset the order which enshrines that source of her power. And there is no doubt Lizzie represents that possibility of "dis-order."

Mr. Borden's sudden return from town derails Lizzie's plans only momentarily, and she soon lulls him to sleep/death. The play's ambiguity remains intact because although The Actress/Lizzie takes the hatchet from the pile of clothes, the blackout prevents the audience from actually seeing her strike the blow. The further complexity of women's complicity in Blood Relations is captured in the hatchet exchange between the Actress and Miss Lizzie. Pollock once again gives specific stage directions to govern this crucial scene:

> The Actress stands with the hatchet raised in the same position in which we saw before the blackout, but the couch is empty. Her eyes are shut. The sound comes from her. MISS LIZZIE moves to the ACTRESS, reaches up to take the hatchet from her. When MISS LIZZIE's hand touches the ACTRESS's, the ACTRESS releases the hatchet and whirls round to face MISS LIZZIE who is left holding the hatchet. The ACTRESS backs away from MISS LIZZIE. (121)

Although Miss Lizzie would seem to "own" the responsibility for her parents' death in this scene by reaching for the hatchet, the Actress does not appear to accept her own responsibility for the recreation of the past, in which she has explored her own murderous impulses by assuming Lizzie's role.

In her final scene with her sister Emma, the docile daughter, Miss Lizzie postulates her own theory of responsibility and guilt:

> It was you who brought me up, like a mother to me. Almost like a mother. Did you ever stop and think that I was like a puppet, our puppet. My head your hand, yes, your hand working my mouth, me saying all the things you felt like saying, me doing all the things you felt like doing, me spewing forth, me hitting out, and you, you -! (122)

As Miss Lizzie is still holding the hatchet, this is a scene filled with menace -- a well-orchestrated bit on Pollock's part. This speech seems to suggest that passive women who do not act to resist their own exploitation, thus allowing it to continue for themselves and others, are also culpable, perhaps more "guilty" than those who lash out to seek their own space and definition.

Pollock's tough-mindedness about Blood Relation's ending is on a certain level the stuff of radical feminist theatre. Pollock allows Lizzie's anger to burn until the play's end and beyond; she does not soften or sentimentalize her character by a final reconciliation scene, a move which suggests that there can be no rapprochement with the oppression that warped Miss Lizzie. When a terrified, befuddled Emma asks, "Do you want to drive me mad?" Miss Lizzie's answer is a chilling, "Oh yes." Furthermore, Miss Lizzie's refusal to admit her guilt reflects her refusal to take on a responsibility that is not hers alone. She has refused to be the Dutiful Daughter, the Ministering Wife or the Woman Gone Wrong. She will be neither victimized nor sentimentalized. Her cryptic answer, "I didn't. You did," is directed at the Actress, at the Audience and at Society -- none of whom wishes to see the "truth" from Miss Lizzie's perspective.

As a materialist feminist drama, Blood Relations succeeds on a number of levels: integral to its action and character development is an analysis of the economic and social conditions oppressing women at the turn of the century. As well as using metadrama to criticize and satirize the society it reflects, the play allows both its actors and its audience the possibility of transformation. Miss Lizzie is reflected as a character who has seized the possiblity of acting to change the life she is so oppressed by, and the audience is stimulated to re-examine the society that would assign women limited space and expect them to inhabit it unthinkingly.

iv

Pamela Boyd's brief, four-scene play Inside Out,[72] offers one woman's view of a somewhat untenable domestic liaison in which the woman follows the conventional maternal, stay-home role. Although it is a comedy, the play presents a closed and claustrophobic picture of domesticity as seen through the eyes of a woman who often feels trapped and overwhelmed. In a sense, although the play is set in a contemporary Toronto home, the options facing the married Ellen do not seem much more hopeful than those facing the spinster Lizzie in Blood Relations. First performed in February, 1986, at Tarragon Extra Space in Toronto, the play is an interesting one-woman show in which the actress who plays the thwarted scriptwriter Ellen Ross (in the first production enacted by the playwright herself) shares the stage with a clinging, mewling "child" named Arran (a pun on "arrant," meaning bad or undisciplined). However, "Arran," supposedly 18 months old, is actually "a life-sized, stuffed, caricature puppet" whose dependency is represented by velcro strips on his hands "so that when his arms are wrapped around Ellen's leg he can hang on." Boyd's deliberate and overt use of this sort of ironic physical theatre makes a concerted, non-Romantic point about the inexorable

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[72] Pamela Boyd, "Inside Out," in Newest Plays by Women (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1987), pp. 96-136.

24-hour-a-day role of Motherhood and the inescapable duties and burdens it entails which, paradoxically, idealized portraits of motherhood ignore or gloss over.

A clue to Ellen's state of mind is given in Boyd's stage directions:

> The set is a bright, sunny kitchen in a rented Toronto house. It is colourful and attractive, but obviously done on the cheap, and suicidally clean. . . . Ellen is 35, determined and runs on nervous energy. Whenever the action allows, she wipes the table, counter or fridge. This is almost subconscious. At no point does she indulge in self-pity. (97)

Inside Out traces the housebound mother's exhausting, hectic and frustrating day as she struggles to reactivate her writing career while mired in domestic minutiae. Boyd's play thus can be seen as an examination of the "trap of interiority" which prevents many women from achieving an identity outside the home, no matter what artistic or non-domestic skills they may have, no matter what "modern" opportunities society allegedly offers them.

Unlike Elizabeth in Wendy Lill's Memories of You, Ellen is not a "single parent": her situation is perhaps more frustrating because she has a conspicuously absent husband named Tom, who leaves child-tending role to his wife while he is out pursuing an acting career. It is possible to read resentment into Ellen's words, but she also strives to give "Daddy" credit when speaking to Arran:

> Daddy's gone to work to keep a roof over our heads. He got up while we were still sleeping. He's gone to work . . . to have a shower on T.V. and tell all the people how well Head and

> Shoulders gets rid of his dandruff. . . which he doesn't even have. . . . (101)

Boyd does not romanticize Ellen's husband's job nor does she make him into a brute. He is just wrapped up in his own career, and forgets what Ellen's frustration's are like. One of the many poignant aspects of the play is Ellen's somewhat futile attempt to keep abreast of the "outside" world by listening to news broadcasts on the radio. She tries listening to and thinking about the news while she goes about her household tasks -- making breakfast and trying to get Arran to "poop" in his potty. But, of course, it is difficult for her to concentrate:

> Unemployment down. That's good . . . except Newfoundland, it's up, eighteen per cent . . . that's awful, that's almost one fifth of the population. That can't be right . . . No, I'm sure they said eighteen per cent; that's terrible. (101)

Ellen is right about the eighteen percent figure, but this scene perhaps serves to illustrate how being home with no adults to converse with, lacking "outside" feedback, can undermine a mother's confidence, and might eventually cause her to feel she has "nothing to say."

After a day of cleaning, cooking, and toilet-training Arran, Ellen is devastated when her evening out is cancelled. She loses her cool entirely when her husband (who is always represented in the play at the other end of a telephone -- which is for Ellen an instrument of communication and torture, since by it, many disappointments from the "outside" are relayed to her) fails to come home for dinner -- after asking her to prepare it for him and a friend Claude. Instead, he has been out wining and dining with the very director whom Ellen has been trying to interest in one of her scripts, a script she has painstakingly written over the course of "five hundred naps." But, because Tom is "out there," in the workaday world, he has had the opportunity to meet Jason, the director, whereas Ellen, who has actually a past connection with the man, is denied a chance to see him because she is isolated at home and must rely upon the availability of a babysitter -- whom she has mistakenly cancelled -- for her "freedom."

By five-thirty in the day, Ellen has had to adjust her plans several times and is awaiting a phone call from Jason, so she can talk to him about her script, and for Tom and Claude to come home for the dinner she's prepared. She looks at herself in the mirror while she waits:

> You know, if you don't look at my face, I look like a young person, on the verge of a brilliant career . . . if you don't look at my face. . . . If you do, I look like a more mature, tired person, who might be interesting . . . . Then I open my mouth . . . . . and nothing comes out. . . . I look like a boring person who never reads the paper . . . . . . Maybe I should get a haircut. (124)

At this point, Ellen's confidence is fast waning, and she is brought back to her reality abruptly when Arran almost chokes on a plum pit, a near tragedy which puts everything into perspective for her, so that when the phone -- finally -- starts to ring, she unplugs it from the wall.

However, in the play's final scene, when it is seven-thirty, Boyd sheds the tone of rueful comedy. Ellen is at the end of her patience:

> I know Tom, it's never your fault. . . . Sure you could come home now if you don't mind a butcher knife in the gut. . . . Of course I'm mad, it's been a crappo day, in more ways than one. You can take the whole thing and blow it out your ass. (179)

Ellen bares her primal disappointment and rage in a long-overdue stream-of-consciousness monologue brimming with sardonic one-liners about her circumscribed life. Giving imaginary guests a tour of her domain, Ellen's sarcasm is knife-edged:

> No, no, I've been doing a lot of writing lately. See here's my typewriter, but the "H" sticks, so I type in cockney. . . . (132)
>
> But I do try. I try to keep myself up, show off my attributes, write the odd screenplay. I've written one recently, against great odds, great odds. It's about hope and faith. Bringing up children in this day and age should be enough you say. Should be fulfillment. Should be fulfillment. . . . (134)

Boyd clearly spells out what the choice of motherhood means for many women: isolation and the cessation of their career. And the loneliness and lack of support can have horrifying results, as is suggested in the scene near the play's end in which Ellen, in her frenzied enactment, nearly smothers the "baby" with a pillow. Fortunately, Ellen is a "creative" person and she only acts out what is in her heart, she does not act on it. But the scene, if acted at the right desperate pitch, conveys the despair, entrapment, frustration and loneliness of the housebound mother.

However, even though Inside Out is shot through with anger at the basic inequity of Ellen's position, a dilemma liberal femininism does not adequately address, its brevity makes it function as a sketch of stresses rather than a truly subversive drama. Boyd accurately critiques the inequities Ellen faces, but she offers her no out, no opportunity for transformation or for changing her reality. In the play's final scene, Ellen makes the choice that the majority of mothers must: she puts her reverie aside to comfort her child and to tell him she loves him. She puts her self aside because her goal must be to ensure that, "you're going to grow up to be a big, strong, beautiful boy." The audience is left aware of the unfairness of the division of labor in Ellen's family, but it is not given any suggestion of how Tom could change or Ellen could have more freedom. Truly, Inside Out is a bleak comedy because it offers no hope of a different life for Ellen. The possibility of transformation is only suggested as a thing of the future when -- perhaps -- Arran, as a result of Ellen's parenting and politics, may grow up to be a different kind of man than his father and thus may be more present in the day-to-day rearing of his own children. But, for Ellen, the play suggests, tomorrow will be pretty much like today -- and she will be continually thwarted in her effort to keep her writing career alive or to garner a more equitable division of child-rearing labour. And yet, because she is full of mother-love for Arran, she is bound to care for him. She may be able to take up her writing again, but not until he is older and more independent. And of course, by then, she may have lost both her skills and her contacts.

V

8

In Margaret Hollingsworth's labyrinthine metadrama War Babies[73], we find a play which seems to hover somewhere between materialist-feminist and radical-feminist philosophy. A complex and sustained play within a play (P.W.P), War Babies provides both a dream-like counterpoint to the "reality" that makes up one middle-aged couple's daily life and also functions as the psychological commentary upon the fears and passions that husband and wife -- Esme and Colin Creary -- fail to articulate as their mundane conversations -- and conflicts -- develop. First produced in 1984, War Babies is a taxing, difficult, and often frustrating, look at the power struggle between a man and a woman jousting over two realms which the playwright sets up as the male (competition and conflict) and female (creation and procreation) worlds. But the play's representation of Colin and Esme's war games is also an exploration of the "push-pull," to use Hollingsworth's term, between the inner, private world pursued by the stay-at-home writer and the and the outer, public one reflected by the dispatch-filing war journalist engaged in the "outside" world. In the "real" part of the play, the husband Colin seems to reflect liberal feminist traits, attending pre-natal classes with the pregnant Esme, even doing better at the breathing exercises than she does. Furthermore, he seems to want the child, while she is filled with fear about the impending birth. One of the most stimulating, albeit disconcerting, effects of War Babies is the many ways in which it calls into question facile or arbitrary gender stereotypes, leading the audience to wonder which behavior is actually "normal." Such blurring of borders is evident in one of the play's most highly charged scenes: when Esme, through her poetry reading, makes public the huge gap between what Colin sees and what he writes in her "Media Mumbles" presentation (173). Colin's anger indicates she has stepped beyond her "place" in satirizing his endeavors.

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[73] Margaret Hollingsworth, "War Babies," in Willful Acts (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1985).

The relationship between Colin and Esme is combative, uneasy even when a truce is in effect. And although they share the same house, they actually live worlds apart. Hollingsworth dramatizes these two worlds in War Babies by creating dual versions of the same characters, Esme and Colin 1 and 2. Overall, in both the frame play and the play within the play, Esme seems to be the stronger member of the couple: not only is she, as the creative force (the playwright within the play), the source of a liberal feminist perspective, an antidote to the rote, patriarchal world of journalism, but she seems better able to mediate between the two worlds and, ultimately, take action in both.

In an interview with Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much, Hollingsworth says she is intrigued by the challenge of "presenting the inner world."[74] She expresses ambivalence about the dual-character technique used in War Babies:

> I don't really like dualities on stage. . . I don't like two people representing one. . . .

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[74] Rudakoff and Much, "Margaret Hollingsworth Interview," Fair Play, pp. 144-164.

> It's funny that I do it more for the women than the men characters. But that's probably because I don't know what the male inner world is. I know what their outer world is and I can reflect that really well. But I'm just not sure what their inner world is. I'm not sure they care to know either. . . . (157)

Hollingsworth goes on to say that she thinks few plays written from a male perspective offer "that look inside." Exploring this sort of "inner space," she says, makes people very nervous:

> That inner world is an element that makes my plays very female and makes men afraid of them. . . . I've actually had men say to me, "I don't like these inner voices. I don't think they work in the theatre."
> Well, I think they do work. Shakespeare uses them. He finds ways, for example in Hamlet, to look in. (157)

It would seem, then that War Babies is feminist in perspective since the playwright makes female experience the core of the drama, and makes the female perspective pivotal in characters' points of view. Such an approach, Hollingsworth says, can alienate a male audience:

> It's no good people saying to me that. . . male and female reactions are all the same. It simply isn't true. A lot of the men in the audience were left quite cold by War Babies. (161)

Certainly, in War Babies, Colin becomes very restive, even anxious, when he has to maintain contact with the female world Esme represents. In Hollingsworth's view:

> Colin goes back to war because he doesn't know what else to do. Or how to fit into the female world. It's very threatening when the female world comes to confront him (with the pregnancy). (163)

The provocative opening in darkness of War Babies is reminiscent of David Rudkin's play Ashes, which also focuses upon conception, and which features an oblique conversation that skillfully draws the audience into the couple's private world.[75] Hollingsworth makes immediately clear that competition, both verbally and for the balance of power, is the norm between Esme and Colin: they hold knitting contests in the dark and then compare results, bickering childishly. It turns out that Esme is trying to help Colin "learn to be a mother" (151). And Colin very much resents the project, alleging that his wife is "trying to muzzle me." The verbal jousting is relentless, an impediment to intimacy, and Esme wants it to stop:

> Can't we make out without playing games? I
> mean -- we're grown up mummies and daddies
> now. When the kid comes . . . (151)

But Colin is clearly uneasy with such a step: his response is more games, satiric Swiftean cracks about roasting the baby. It turns out that the real issue is Colin's reporter's job which takes him off to world trouble spots (the public sphere), and which Esme wants him to put on hold in order to be with her (private realm) while the baby is being born. Colin tries to use humour to hide his dislike of the "nesting" changes taking over his wife:

> You know my biggest fear? After this lot's

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[75] David Rudkin, Ashes (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978). In this play, first performed in 1974, a couple named (ironically) Colin and Anne, he in his early thirties, she in her late twenties, go through traumatic physical and psychological contortions before finally reaching the realization that they cannot conceive a child together. Themes of birth and regeneration, private and public worlds are discussed, but the point of view is decidedly male.

> over I'm gonna come home and I'm not gonna recognize my own wife. She'll metamporphose into some gigantic walking tit with a feather duster and a pair of pliers strapped around the nipple. (154)

Colin seems to fear the "devouring, omnipotent female" image which Hightower complains about in Crabdance. Nevertheless, there seems to be some justification to Colin's complaint that Esme keeps "putting me in the adversary role," because she does seem to need his resistance as a means of defining herself. Furthermore, she seems determined to undermine what little privacy they share by initiating the visit of the "extended family," which consists of her ex-husband Jack and Colin's "ex-lady," Barbara, now teamed up to raise Esme and Jack's son Craig.

When Esme asks Colin if he can "imagine how it will be in three years' time," Hollingsworth is signalling the beginning of the ensuing 22 P.W.P sequences. The first one shows Colin in jail, as do several later scenes, a setting which may be interpreted in several ways: Esme's anger at Colin (and her own femaleness) over being incarcerated in pregnancy may be symbolized by the jail motif; or Colin may be in jail as a result of a misstep on an asssignment, which he must pursue even if it takes him to dangerous situations because he is imprisoned by his competitive need to stay on the job; or the jail scenes may reflect how Colin feels enclosed/imprisoned by domestic life. The P.W.P. sequences, thus, both serve to defamiliarize the audience by upsetting the expected or regular pattern of the action on stage and to explore many unspoken psychological nuances in Esme and Colin's strained relationship. Significantly, the "jailer" in the P.W.P. prison is Craig, which suggests both Esme's and Colin's fears about being entrapped by progeny, and which also may be an enactment of Esme's guilt, since she has left Barbara to raise her son. It is to Craig, rather than to Esme, that Colin confesses killing the "kid" in the Sudan. Craig is unimpressed by Colin's bragging about his war exploits; the youth is uninterested and tells his father he doesn't watch the news because "it's always the same" (158).

As Sadie is in Crabdance, and as the Actress is in Blood Relations, Esme is the "creative source," the instigator of the action in War Babies, which fact provides an ironic counterpoint to Colin's, and later Jack's, relentless talk about the importance of being on the job, of keeping his hand in the action, of staying competitive. Hollingsworth deliberately shows Esme being productive on two levels: she is pregnant and thus creating new life, but while she is waiting for it to happen, she is creating a new play, as is evidenced in the P.W.P. And in the play she is writing, Esme is re-arranging her domestic life more to her liking, by making Colin "the editor of a small-time newspaper out west" (181). Here Hollingsworth seems determined to direct the audience to reconsider the whole idea of which realm is more important (which has the most "life" in it), Colin's public world or Esme's private one, a world she's driven into by her pregnancy and ensuing motherhood, a world which can be truly "crazy-making," as Pamela Boyd's Inside Out vividly demonstrates.

But as Esme confesses, she "can't control it," the play keeps getting away from her. At this point, the audience may feel that Hollingsworth can't control the action of her play either: the disruptive, interruptive imaginings of the P.W.P. come thick and fast as Esme writes out her interiorized hopes and fears. In this way, the entire play becomes an exploration of the female tendency to express emotion and confess feelings, as opposed to the male tendency to report facts and repress feelings. Once Colin and Esme are, within the confines of the P.W.P. relocated "out west," Esme's own life takes on a nightmare quality: she becomes an agoraphobic, cannot look after the son, Matthew, she and Colin have produced, and Barbara has been transformed into her competent housewifely sister with whom Colin has a rather workmanlike affair. As a reaction against her powerlessness, Esme takes up bankrobbing, a macho role, and successfully pulls off several jobs, while Colin becomes all the more slothful and reclusive. She is able to do this, Hollingsworth suggests, because she is an invisible middle-aged woman of whom no one expects such anti-social behavior.

However, even in the P.W.P., the same "games" go on: Esme goads Colin into "firing" her newly acquired "survivor's gun" at her. And Esme truly "wins" the conflict in the P.W.P.: she leaves and Colin is arrested for all the robberies. When the police come for Colin, one of the officers "pulls back covers revealing Colin 2 curled up foetus like around gun" (215). This scene echoes an early moment in the play when Esme tells Colin, "I sometimes dream there's a little replica of you [points at his stomach] in there -- curled up with a gun" (151). Is Hollingsworth here suggesting that violence feeds upon itself and returns to haunt its perpetrators? The matter is not that simple, of course, because, as Colin points out, the gun is not his. And furthermore, Esme has hardly been a helpless victim of the aggression in her relationship with Colin.

Overall, War Babies is both a challenging and a frustrating play. From the outset, the playwright makes clear that there is a large gap between the male and female worlds which liberal feminism does not acknowledge. She suggests the male world is outer/public and the female is inner/private, especially in the case of Esme who is focused inward, upon the child growing in her womb. However, women need not remain confined in the private sphere. Through the vehicle of the Play Within the Play, Hollingworth makes clear that women have the power and intelligence (and especially the imagination), to transform their worlds, to come up with new scenarios, to write themselves new roles. The cheeky iconoclasm of the P.W.P. scenes, however, sits uneasily with the frame-play's conclusion, in which the playwright stages what seems to be a facile and unexpected rapprochement between Esme and her long-estranged son Craig. Perhaps it is possible that the new baby, the ominously named Cassandra, is the impetus for a new life for Esme and the family she would build around herself, but it seems a little too pat, following so close on the heels of the many satiric moments in the P.W.P world. However, while War Babies is an overly rambling and not entirely satisfying drama, it does show a woman playwright addressing women's concerns, challenging her audience to re-think its assumptions about the nature of male and female roles, Most important of all, it offers both critical and transformative scenarios which cannot fail to stimulate a re-examination of family relationships and speak to all contemporary audience members struggling to re-negotiate the issue of domestic partnership.

vi

Wendy Lill's Memories of You[76] explores many of the same concerns at the heart of War Babies and Inside Out, but sets its examination of the struggle between motherhood and artistic creativity later in a woman character's life, and adds a daughter's perspective to the discussion. Lill's play, written after the death of poet and novelist Elizabeth Smart in 1986, is, according to the playwright, and as the title indicates, "about memory." Both its sets and scenes "have the unfinished, floating qualities of memories." In an interview published in Books in Canada, Lill makes clear she is not one of Smart's "groupies." [77] But she says she felt Smart was judged differently for her unconventional life choices than was a male writer such as Milton Acorn. After Smart died, Lill says, the way academics and feminists were interpreting her life made her "angry." Both Acorn and Smart, Lill believes, were "loose cannons, wild cards." But literary history would treat them differently:

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[76] Wendy Lill, Memories of You (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1989), p. 8.

[77] Robin Metcalfe, Letters Out, an article about Wendy Lill in Books in Canada (Toronto, The Canadian Review of Books, March 1990), pp. 21-24.

> Why is it acceptable for men to behave in that way and not be judged so harshly? I had a lot of trouble with her. I was angry at her. I found her indulgent, and I didn't like a lot of her writing. . I just wanted to say, 'Can't we at least give her some air time and let her talk about her life?' Why can't we allow people to make those kinds of choices? (23)

In Smart's angry, alienated daughter Rose (now deceased as well), Lill finds a vehicle through which to pose feminists' questions about Smart's life: was she George Barker's dupe? was her art overtaken by her domestic duties? can a writer have it all, combining irrepressible passion with creative distance, and still manage to work? However, Lill says she does not want to answer those questions for her audience:

> The only thing I can do is present this woman and have her turn around in front of you so you can see her in different ways. (23)

Lill achieves that emotional and intellectual pirouetting wonderfully: as the argument rages back and forth between Elizabeth and Rose, between Betty and her mother Louise, the audience is able to see enacted conflicts between three generations of women, representing three different approaches to women's domestic roles.

Lill's tactic of presenting the same type of conflict from two different eras -- Smart as willful daughter pitted against her own mother and Smart as beleaguered mother under attack from her own angry child -- is a simple but highly effective dramatic means of delineating the ways women's roles have -- and have not -- changed over a 40-year span of time. Thus the play is given a sort of historical continuity which also comments upon itself, making one character's memories self-reflexive. This is a somewhat different technique than Pollock uses in Blood Relations, where one character ostensibly recreates the life of another to answer her own -- and the public's questions -- about that characters' past. Here Elizabeth is forced by her daughter, someone who "remembers" events quite differently, into confrontation with her own past. Elizabeth must relive her own memories as it were, in front of a judgemental and contentious assessor, making Memories of You a much more raw, immediate and painful drama to read or watch than is Blood Relations.

Although the young Betty was rebellious, she lacks the angry, self-destructive edge we see in Rose, who openly condemns her mother for her "stupid" choices, and whom George (in his usual astute but cavalier fashion) describes as being "the condensed anger of all women" (20). Lill's stage directions suggest that Lill is sympathetic to Elizabeth, who in turn strives for a tone of detached irony with her daughter:

> ([Elizabeth] is flushed and cold from the outside. Late fifties, blonde hair, a tired, wrecked face. Dressed in a heavy jacket, wool cap, boots. Looks around at the mess, the peeled oilcloth. Stares at ROSE as if trying to figure out the meaning of her presence and yet somehow resigned to it. She parks the moped in the middle of the kitchen. (10)

But detachment only fuels Rose's rage; her mother's writerly ability to maintain a certain distance has enraged Rose all her life. Elizabeth's opening, "How long have you been here?" is not the response Rose needs. From the outset, Lill's dialogue establishes the two women's basic relationship as openly combative:

> ROSE: (offhand) You look like an old bag lady.
> ELIZABETH: You look like a malnourished bat. (10)

Later, when Rose admits she's selling flowers at Victoria Station, Elizabeth laughingly responds, "you're not exactly the epitome of romance," to which Rose replies, "And you're not exactly Jean Harlow anymore either" (18), an exchange which voices both the subtext of the play's theme as well as the suggestion of an unacknowledged competition, perhaps even jealousy, between the two. Underlying the insulting banter, though, one glimpses affection and caring, even if mother-daughter conflict often obscures it.

However, between the 16-year-old Betty and her high-society mother Louise, ~~the~~ relationship seems much colder, more of a hard-edged power struggle. Lill's initial scene from Elizabeth's youth, in which Louise castigates Betty for fanciful entries in her journal, has an ugly edge to it, as Louise accuses her daughter of being not a rebel at all but, "one of the most meticulous, prissy, scheming little items to ever venture out of Rockcliffe" (16). Later in the play, family history repeats itself:

> ROSE: Last night, I dreamt (George) was eaten alive by that stupid cross-eyed dog of his - Flaubert . . . . . But Flaubert couldn't even stomach him and coughed him into a flowerbed in Kew Garden where he came up as a sort of sickly deformed tulip.
> ELIZABETH: I think you make up your dreams when you are sitting on the M1.
> ROSE: What if I do? (21)

For all her apparent razor-edged cynicism, it is possible Rose has come to Elizabeth's country cottage to "comfort" her upon the occasion of George's latest marriage -- this time to a 30-year-old replica of Rose's older sister Georgina. Naturally, Elizabeth's assumed insouciance in the face of this outrage further infuriates Rose, who just as quickly abandons her role of comforter to taunt and revile her mother. Lill here shows Rose's inability to find her autonomy because she is still, in the sort of "push-pull" Margaret Hollingsworth describes in male-female relationships, attached to the very woman she is infuriated with. (This is the sort of interaction modern family therapists term psychologically incestuous.)

Lill's play outlines two sets of needs in the two daughters: Rose needs attention and a great deal of her mother's love, while Betty -- who is far more focused and headstrong -- needs to get away from her family's circumscribing rules of conduct. Rose is, of course, the more needy and thus the more tragic of the two daughters. While Betty/Elizabeth is always guided by her fixed -- albeit incompatible -- passions for both George Barker and for her writing, Rose seems always to be at loose ends, to be drifting from job to job, man to man, carelessly acquiring children, whom she then casually dumps "with their respective wimp-assed fathers" (13). This behavior disturbs Elizabeth who always kept her children with her, no matter how dire her situation. At the core of Rose's personality is her inability to forgive her mother and the anger which gets in the way of her love. Self-destructive in a way totally alien to the exuberant Elizabeth, Rose cloaks her pain in anger and cynicism, and when that doesn't work, blurs everything with drugs. This approach contrasts starkly with

Elizabeth, who, even now, alone, obviously not wealthy, and still no literary giant, is clearly a woman who has "known what (she) wanted" (29) and pursued it with all her heart.

As the play's flashbacks progress, and more of the young Elizabeth is revealed, it is evident that she pursued her passion for George Barker willfully and exuberantly, that despite his inability to settle down with her, he was also unable to extricate himself from the on-again, off-again relationship with her, that he was a victim of her beauty and sensuality; in short, that he was weaker than she in many ways. Rose refuses to admit that, even though it may not look like much, her mother's life is of her own design, and has been so since one time when her reading of D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love revealed to her that "there were emotions inside me that could take me to the moon" (35). Rose is a little like her father in discounting the nature of these emotions: he dismisses them as "sexual awakening"; Rose disdains them as stupid weaknesses, foibles, when in fact they reflect Elizabeth's connectedness to her creative energy. George at least realizes that, in the face of the passion he and Elizabeth face, "I don't stand a chance" (40). Later, he tells Louise, "she has fixed me with her passion. I am like a poor bug that has been pinned to the wall" (47). Here again we see a man articulating the apparently age-old fear of the devouring, all-consuming woman. At the end of the initially idyllic California sojourn, George is unequal to Elizabeth's passion; he is "overwhelmed" by her (52), and he must scuttle back to his secure, unchaotic life with his much-betrayed first wife, so that he can be free to write.

Not for Betty the role of self-sacrificing handmaiden; when George accuses her of being "moody, selfish, spoiled, conceited and self-absorbed," an undismayed Betty retorts, "So are you!" (50), apparently having not at all subscribed to the theory of the martyred woman who must sacrifice herself and/or her career for a man. In this way, in her view of herself as an artist and in her stout ego, Betty is very much a "male" character. One cannot imagine, for example, her putting herself aside to the extent that Ellen does in _Inside Out_. The creative drive, Lill seems to suggest here, can be equally strong in men and women.

Alas, as the play makes clear, in the face of the results of such unguarded passion -- four children to feed and raise -- Betty's Muse finds scant houseroom. Perhaps because it is only hinted at, the most poignant revelation of Lill's play is that by the time Elizabeth realizes her writing would have to be sacrificed to mundane breadwinning tasks in order to keep her children, she was already too trapped to extricate herself. That truth is not wasted on Rose, who notes:

> George wrote. George made a big fucking deal out of writing. That's the way men are. But you couldn't seem to get the words out. You were always too tired or distracted or freaked out about one thing or another. (53)

Ironically, Rose might well be describing her own inability to get her life on track when she hurls these accusations at Elizabeth, a point not lost on her mother. What Rose does not credit is her mother's primal joy in the life-giving process which she revelled in as uniquely female. She wanted the four children she had with the feckless George Barker. They were a choice she made. When Elizabeth suddenly offers to look after Rose's children so her daughter can go off with "Strange William," Rose, perhaps unequal to more guilt about her mother's "wasted" life, shouts, "don't sacrifice another thing for me!" Yet, despite her grudging sympathy for her mother, Rose cannot let go of her anger that Elizabeth's choices always left them "alone" with their mother "staring at us like we were specimens from another planet" (57). Elizabeth, of course, cherishes different memories:

> . . . and I turned my hat inside out and Christopher got so excited he wet his pants and we all got so silly that Georgina hid behind a hibiscus hedge and you went and yanked her out and told her that it didn't matter if we were making fools of ourselves, as long as we were all together. (57)

Rose speaks for many feminist critics who deplore what the historical person Elizabeth Smart sacrificed -- her art, the possibility of a more extensive body of work -- for the sake of "love":

> You get that dumb animal look on your face when you talk about love. I have to fight the urge to smash it in. You had it all. A lot more than me. You were beautiful, rich, sexy, smart. He knocked you up and left you -- he used you and threw you out like an old safe. Why don't you just admit it? (62)

But, as Elizabeth sees it, "he left but I was still full of him, full of his inspiration," and thus able to write By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept. Although Elizabeth might agree with Byron's Julia that love is "woman's whole existence," in that she is eager to throw herself whole-heartedly (and whole-bodiedly) into passion's throes, she is not passive in the face of it. Instead, she attempts to use it as a source of energy for her writing, and views men as Muse-objects to give her inspiration. In her own way, on her own terms, both the young Betty and the older Elizabeth bought into the Romantic myth about the artist's role in life, and adapted it to her circumstances as best she could.

Lill is absolutely correct in her refusal to portray Smart as a victim, to conflate her life into just one more sad story of yet another hard-done-by single mother. Unlike Rose, Elizabeth has the joie de vivre and determination to stick by her choices. Rose, alas, seems to drift along. Things happen to Rose; Elizabeth makes things happen. She orchestrates the conception of her babies because she loves children, and she refuses to trade her happy memories of them for Rose's crabbed ones. Even when Louise offers relief by "taking the children back with me to Canada," (88), Betty refuses because she cannot accept social "limitations" of her mother's life:

> LOUISE: You are a woman, Betty, perhaps beautiful, but a woman nonetheless, now rendered helpless by children in a man's world.
> BETTY: Not helpless. If anything, more powerful.
> LOUISE: But only if you accept those limitations and work with them. That's all I've ever asked you to do. Accept order, respectability, compassion . . .
> BETTY: But it's all a facade. (89)

And Elizabeth hangs on to her vision of herself as a woman of action, a romantic adventurer, a seeker of experience. She is enraged by Rose's charge that "You were just another poor victim like the rest of us," claiming, "I was no victim! I was an explorer!" (91). Goaded by Rose, Elizabeth admits, "Yes, it was hard. I wanted to be a lover and a writer and a mother and I botched them all up . . . But at least I tried, Rose."

Ultimately, Memories of You is a vindication of Elizabeth Smart's energy, her greed for experience, her belief in her own path, her vision of herself as a creative spirit, and her refusal to see the world as belonging only to man. Thus, in this play she sounds neither deluded nor pitiable when she tells her depressed daughter, "I got exactly what I wanted. I loved being buried alive by my love. I needed to be needed" (92). And for all the pain between Rose and her self, as there was between herself and Louise, Elizabeth can give her daughter a benediction:

> I loved her. And I love you, Rose. I chose you. But she was right. I didn't take enough care. I didn't leave enough space for flowers to grow. I'm sorry. But I did try. And you'll have to try too. (96)

With those words, Elizabeth is emphasizing the value of free choice and trying to set Rose free to find her own way. Meanwhile, she will pursue her own route, alone, by again saying "yes," and taking up a writer-in-residence post "at that Canadian university . . . Maybe if they chain me to the heating pipes, I'll finally be able to finish my poems." Despite her record as endlessly maternal, Elizabeth opts to give herself creative space, artistic freedom, a new chance -- a move her own mother probably would never have had the courage to take. Elizabeth's choice is a radical move for a woman of her age and background, and in choosing to put her maternal duties behind her and seek a space to conduct her own work, Elizabeth is demonstrating a new and daring self-sufficiency.

All the plays in this chapter can be called feminist because they have taken as their subject the role of woman as active creator and shaper of her world and her destiny. Starting with Gwen Pharis Ringwood's gutsy Jasmine in The Lodge, who, despite her age, goes to Australia to pursue her art, to Beverley Simons's protean Sadie in Crabdance, to the defiant Lizzie in Blood Relations, to the tireless playwright Esme in War Babies, ending with Wendy Lill's self-actualizing Elizabeth in Memories of You, here are six women playwrights creating women characters who are struggling to be heroes of their own lives rather than passive victims of someone else's actions. The only possible exception to this motif is Ellen in Pamela Boyd's Inside Out, but even she keeps fighting and has written a playscript despite her all-consuming domestic duties. All of these characters, to varying degrees of success, and with various purposes in mind, have combined domestic life with some sort of self-expression, and have refused to become effaced.

Except for Simons (and she is a unique case) the above playwrights all argue for a society which allows women to integrate their private and public selves, without sacrificing one to the other. But their plays also suggest that the entire idea of a woman's "role" has become increasingly complex, as she attempts to juggle the job society has always dictated as her ideal state -- that of wife and mother -- with that which increased liberation now posits (even demands) -- that of career woman and perhaps even activist. In fact, personal concerns may no longer be simply private ones. For Ellen, Esme and Elizabeth, their own expectations of themselves make their conflicts double-edged as they strive to function successfully in both the "private" sphere as mothers and in the "public" realm as writers. Older characters such as Jasmine and Sadie, who are no longer enmeshed in the child-rearing stage of their lives, who are "past it," are in a sense freer because their need to juggle two worlds is less urgent. Lizzie, on the other hand, has the least "status" of all as an unmarried woman, and yet demands the most freedom of all. Nevertheless, in different ways, the characters in these plays grope towards some sort of creative endeavour. Sometimes writing itself functions as a vehicle of both self-expression and revenge: for instance, both Ellen and Esme struggle to write even when they feel trapped, and in the case of War Babies, the metadrama functions as a political vehicle to express alternative lives for the play's characters. And in the process of struggling to integrate public and private worlds, the constancy of self is often in question as the characters refute society's expectations of them, as does the elderly Jasmine in The Lodge, as does Elizabeth in Memories of You; or challenge society's beliefs about them, as does Lizzie in Blood Relations. In every case, no matter how chaotic or circumscribed is the character's world, she in some way transcends those limitations to move one step closer to the autonomy she seeks.

Chapter IV

> ". . .the extremity of patriarchal control of female sexuality may be a reaction to helplessness in the the face of the threat Motherhood represents. The threat and fear of her pleasure; her sex organ, her closeness to Nature, her as the source or origin, her vulnerability, lack of the phallus."
> --Ann Kaplan, Women and Film[78]

i

While domesticity, which involves female fecundity and reproduction, and female sexuality are naturally interconnected issues which really should not be discussed separately, I have separated them for the purposes of this thesis. Following the last chapter's examination of playwrights' representation of women's struggle towards autonomy within the domestic realm, this chapter focuses upon four playwrights who are concerned with the topic of women's sexuality, in particular women's gradual awareness of its validity within their lives and ways it can be used as a vehicle of either enslavement or empowerment. Traditional Western drama contains many examples of plays about sexuality (both heterosexual and homosexual) as seen from a male perspective, including such plays as John Osborne's Look Back in Anger, Arthur Miller's The

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[78] E.A. Kaplan, Women and Film (New York: Methuen, 1983), p. 206.

Crucible, Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and Michel Tremblay's Hosanna. However, in all such dramas, representation of female sexuality from a female perspective is, perhaps understandably, absent. As is clearly evident from remarks by such male characters as Highrise in Crabdance and George Barker in Memories of You, Canadian women playwrights are well aware of the distrust -- and even fear -- of female sexuality which has been to date incorporated into much of Western literature. This chapter analyzes eight plays which dare to select as their topics female sexual expression -- and its counterpart, repression.

This chapter explores two plays about lesbianism by Margaret Hollingsworth, whose characters' relationship reveals the same power struggles often found in heterosexual connections. Next, it looks at Sharon Stearns's Hooking for Paradise, which explores the belief that female sexuality, if removed from male domination, can operate as a powerful positive force. In Betty Lambert's two plays, Jennie's Story and Under the Skin, we find a focus upon the sexual inequities crippling women's lives: in Jennie's case, her abuse at the hands of the parish priest and her subsequent sterilization; in Under the Skin, Emma's abduction by her sickly misogynist next-door neighbour. And in Judith Thompson's three plays (The Crackwalker, White Biting Dog and I Am Yours), we see how vulnerable human beings are made by the rawness of their sexuality.

Margaret Hollingsworth was probably "ahead of her time," in Canadian theatre when she wrote her dramatization of a lesbian relationship between a west-coast island farmer and a veterinarian's wife recovering from a nervous breakdown. The play which claimed such terrain as its own was Alli Alli Oh[79], first produced at Toronto's Redlight Theatre in March, 1977. Hollingsworth continued probing the lives of her characters Alli and Muriel in Islands[80], another one-act play, first produced in March, 1983, by Vancouver's New Play Centre. This time, Muriel, still struggling on her subsistence farm is visited by her mother Rose, the embodiment of conventional maternal expectations, and Alli, just back from further psychiatric treatment.

Studied together, the two plays provide interesting insights into characters who refuse -- or are unable-- to conform to society's sexual expectations of them. Hollingsworth explains her creation of two such characters by saying, "I tend to write a lot about people on a knife edge where one leap in the wrong direction is going to be catastrophic.[81] That certainly is the case with Alli, who appears to savour her journeys in and out of sanity as a way of escaping from a world whose expectations she no longer wishes to meet.

In her self-published 1988 collection, Endangered Species, Hollingsworth notes that women's voice in Canadian theatre is limited.[82] And in an interview two years later, she admits that "a few theatres are producing women's plays now," and defines "female material" as:

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[79] Margaret Hollingsworth, Alli Alli Oh (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1979).

[80] Hollingsworth, "Islands," in Willful Acts, pp. 120-146.

[81] Hollingsworth, as interviewed by Cynthia Zimmerman in The Work, p. 93.

> stuff that you can find if you dig. . . . a different consciousness. It's not documentary material or one woman getting up and talking directly to an audience about her personal experiences in a one-woman show. I'm talking about plays that deal with women's experiences in an in-depth manner, written in a form that a woman will embrace.[83]

Such views seem to reflect an increased awareness of feminism on Hollingsworth's part. She maintains that the appearance of "large dominant women" ceased in her drama after she wrote Islands, and denied that she "particularly write(s) feminist theatre." Instead, she said:

> I like to create good women's roles. I like to write about women, but that certainly doesn't exclude my writing about men. I think plays have to be more universal than that. (The Work, 94)

In two of Hollingsworth's earliest plays, Bushed (first produced in 1973) and Operators (initially produced in 1974), men are absent, superfluous to the on-stage action. In Alli Alli Oh, even though Alli's husband Karl never appears on stage, he is very much a presence in the play as a symbol of male authority -- just as the agonized cow, outside/offstage, about to give birth at any moment is a symbol of female fecundity.

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[82] Hollingsworth, Endangered Species (Toronto: Act One Press, 1988), p.5.

[83] Hollingsworth interviewed in Fair Play, p. 146.

Both Alli Alli Oh and Islands are about people for whom solid relationships appear to be impossible achievements. Hollingsworth does not hold up women characters as "better" at human affairs than men, but she is interested in exploring the nuances of power and control between female characters. In Alli Alli Oh, it becomes immediately clear that Alli lives very much inside her own mind and, because of this insular interiority, is never going to be able to meet Muriel's physical needs. In fact, the "conversations" between the two women are constantly at cross purposes. While Muriel is discussing practical matters of animal husbandry, Alli is swamped by her own psychological reverie:

> MURIEL: It's a big help having you here. (She smiles) I don't know why we should need him [the local vet]. You should know the ropes by now. (Alli laughs to herself) Married to Karl all that time.
> ALLI: (to herself) I don't like animals.
> MURIEL: Nonsense. (still not finding what she is looking for) I give up. Let's hope we don't need him. Last two have been born dead. If she doesn't put out this time, we'll get rid of her. Shoot her or something. No use being sentimental. She's not even a good milker -- not worth auctioning.
> ALLI: I don't like their smell. Their eyes. The heat of their bodies. I don't want them to touch me.
> MURIEL: (coming up behind her and putting her arms around her neck) You're broody tonight, old girl. Don't let her trouble you.
> ALLI: (staring straight ahead) Bitches. Sows. Cows . . . This female steaminess. (2)

Muriel is a tough person, some would even say masculine, and in her talk about her cow, uses the term "put out" as men often speak of women. In her desire to be the boy her father always wanted, she appears to have adopted "male" manners and values. On the other hand, not only is Alli out of touch when it comes to life on the farm, she appears to be disgusted by all aspects of "femaleness," a hint that her relationship with Muriel is probably doomed. Neither Alli nor Muriel, in fact, seems happy about being a woman. Despite obvious signs to the contrary, Muriel wants to believe that if Alli will relax into the rustic life and "get back in touch with nature," (4) her psychological problems somehow will disappear.

Much of the conflict and power struggle within Alli Alli Oh comes from Hollingsworth's exploration, through Alli, of women's mixed feelings about their femaleness. Such ambiguity amounts to a form of self-contempt, which radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin would say women have absorbed from society's foundations of misogyny. Alli's strong loathing of the "female" is extremely disturbing: she tends to categorize people as animals, implying Muriel's former partner Barbara "took off with the real estate lady" because she preferred pigs and that her own former lover Wendy is a "cow" (6). Clearly, Alli has internalized society's most vicious attitudes about women; this self-destructive side of her personality has not been eradicated by her stay in the hospital.

Alli repeatedly discusses her breakdown in terms of her "menopause," as if she has taken the term "change of life" farther than anyone -- perhaps even she -- expected, from a physical realm and into an inner, psychological one. And she seems repulsed by human sexuality as well, particularly as expressed by Muriel. Later in the play, she finds the thought of Muriel eating revolting, commenting to herself:

> Ugh. . . . Large white teeth that nibble
> the flesh on my shoulder. On my neck. Up
> around my ear -- the tongue flicking in
> and out, sending stabbing sensations through
> my body . . . . (14)

Rather than finding such images erotic, Alli feels attacked by them, "stabbed" by Muriel's desire. Perhaps actual sensation of any kind is the last thing Alli wants; perhaps she has so totally absorbed society's misogyny that the thought of a female body making love or being loved seems an obscenity to her.

As the play continues, and the couple's communication worsens, Muriel's bluff interest in the material world prevents her from picking up the danger signals in what Allie is saying. In fact, one almost suspects she does not want (as an aspect of a "male" model of being?) to deal with her lover's unravelling. Despite this inattention, Alli relives her past in an almost non-stop monologue, compulsively retracing the events leading up to the present. It seems that, when she was Karl's wife, Alli began "acting up" because she was sick and tired of being passive, and felt trapped in the private world of domesticity:

> I'd like to have worked. Any kind of job.
> I could've been Karl's receptionist, he said
> no. (10)

Eventually, Alli goes out and finds a job anyway, as "daily help" to a dentist in another part of town -- but the dentist's wife, "Frau Doctor Lieberhaus" (Freehouse) just happens to have a dog named Swartzy for which Karl is veterinarian. When Alli takes her freedom further, and ("I want to see what it is like to be a clown.") dons white face to throw a pail of water over the gardener, Karl fetches her home in the "animal ambulance" just as if she were an unruly filly -- or a rabid dog.

The escapade lands Alli in a private clinic for a month's rest," and her children are told she is suffering from "nervous exhaustion brought on by the change of life." This labelling is ironic, since Alli has failed at trying to change her life. Alli's biggest regret about her hospitalization is her own "stupidity," her inability to invent herself anew, to think of "a name for myself," and thus elude Karl's ownership and expectations of her. Alli's story of her past life is reminiscent of all the "madwomen in the attic," who were incarcerated for their refusal to act out traditional subservient female roles.[84]

But it is impossible to continue to feel sorry for Alli: she is energetic and determined as she wills her way inward, back to her own world. Hollingsworth herself sees Alli's madness as a "deliberate choice":

> She didn't disintegrate. She chose madness to terminate the relationship. To finally escape into madness is a choice for her. I think there's always this escape hatch which is open for mental patients . . . . You always have that choice, it isn't just mental patients, it's all of us really. (The Work, 97)

And in fact this choice to distance and thus remove herself through madness is one Alli has applied to the "problem" of both Karl and Muriel, although Muriel is just discovering that truth. When Alli remarks:

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[84] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

> Birth. The rhythms of nature. Rhythms.
> How I hate rhythms, (19)

she is posting warning that she is about to pursue her own personally orchestrated cacophony. It's as if menopause (is Hollingsworth suggesting a pun, a "pause" from "men," even surrogate ones such as Muriel?) gives Alli the right to withdraw, a right she has been denied her entire life. Alli implies she has become involved with Muriel partly out of curiosity -- "I wanted to know . . . I tried to imagine how it would be if she held me. Naked." -- and partly out of aimlessness. Now Alli has discovered she doesn't want what Muriel offers; her self-centred quest is doomed because "I couldn't tell who she was in relation to me." Her message to her psychiatrist is perhaps misleading:

> Tell him I'm coming back. Tell him I'm cowed.
> What's that? Coward? Yes. . . yes. . . you
> can tell him that. (21)

But does Alli really feel "cowed"? It would seem instead that she is the aggressor; she taunts Muriel as "Mu" and "Moooo" and seems willfully intent upon her own pursuit of freedom.

Hollingsworth clarifies the riddle of Alli's personality in Islands, which picks up the two women's lives about six months after the events of Alli Alli Oh, when a stilted visit between Muriel and her mother Rose is interrupted by Alli's return. This time, she has been treated in a public hospital rather than in a genteel clinic. She's learned to be "honest" about feelings. In this respect, Alli is the polar opposite of Rose, a thoroughly traditional woman who is overly concerned about appearances and societal conventions. Rose's obsessions provide insight into Muriel's struggle for autonomy, and demonstrate how this mother has been complicit in creating some of her daughter's identity problems. Muriel first disappointed her father by being born female; since then, she has consistently fallen short of Rose's expectations. About to remarry a stodgy-sounding banker, Rose wants a rapprochement with her "prodigal" daughter -- an event derailed by the "wrecker" Alli.

In Islands, although Hollingsworth shows how Alli's pursuit of her inner life has furthered her alienation, her main concern is overtly to tackle society's attitudes towards lesbianism. Bossy, self-absorbed, and critical, Rose fusses over Muriel (thereby fulfilling her own need to "mother") while simultaneously judging her every move on the basis of gender stereotypes. For instance, Rose does not approve of Muriel's attempts at carpentry, saying, "That's man's work" (122). Rose also disagrees with Muriel's version of what her father was like. She says she knew all about her husband's "shenanigans" but looked the other way to preserve appearances and conform to the outward image of a happy marriage. Her attempt to maintain appearances, however, she feels has been undermined by Muriel, who has never been an appropriate daughter figure: she ran her pig farm with "that other girl" and now she is doggedly subsistence-farming on this island, detemined to "make it alone."

Not surprisingly, Rose irritates Muriel constantly, particularly by her assumptions and her insensitivity. Rose attempts to be patient with her mother, but fails:

> ROSE: You can't isolate yourself. We
> all need other people.
> MURIEL: Look Mum -- I'll try to explain.
> (Goes over and sits beside Rose) I don't
> mean to be hard. I just have to protect
> myself. I have to do things my way.
> Without interference from outside.
> ROSE: No man is an island.
> MURIEL: I'm a woman! (126)

Rose is startled by Muriel's vehement answer, perhaps even by the idea that adages applying to men are not true for women. And the last thing Rose wants to hear, as she attempts to launch a new relationship with all the old role divisions intact, is her daughter's bitter theories. But Muriel tells her anyway:

> On this island, in Canada, in every developed country. We're all being forced into living alone -- being alone -- don't you see? Relationships don't make sense any more. (127)

Now it seems that Muriel is as unable to form relationships as Alli once was, that in fact she has given up on them entirely.

However, Alli arrives intending to resume a connection on her own self-centred terms. Instead, she becomes the catalyst for Rose's admission of the truth about her daughter's sexuality. Until now, Muriel has never dared admit she's a lesbian, has been silenced by her mother's wish that she "grow into a . . . woman. . . have children" (130). Obviously, not having children, not being heterosexual is a cancellation of womanhood in Rose's (conventional society's) eyes. Alli's arrival further upends Rose's sense of order. When this agent of chaos forces Rose to acknowledge what she has never really allowed herself to suspect, she becomes angry. She would have preferred her daughter had gone on "keeping things quiet" (140). Nevertheless, Rose asks the eternal maternal question: "what did I do? Where did I go wrong?" Her own internalization of the mother's role dictates that she accept blame for her daughter's life, which is a denial of Muriel's autonomy, a refutation of her choices as an adult sexual being.

Islands, although it does provide a feminist critique of society's marginalization of lesbian experience, seems to offer no hope for relationships maternal or sexual in nature. Muriel gets her wish: she is left alone; Rose goes off to take up her life with her banker/status symbol, and Alli is sent away, locked within her "cold storage," trapped by her "diminished responses." About the only positive note in the play is that Muriel has not allowed Alli to invade and destroy her life again, and despite herself, has admitted the truth about herself.

ii

Sharon Stearns's intention in Hooking for Paradise is to create a drama which reclaims female sexuality from a debased and/or discounted position. Hooking For Paradise[85], commissioned by Workshop West Playwrights' Theatre and first produced at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, in November, 1981, reflects an early effort by an English-Canadian playwright to deal directly and openly with issues of "sexual politics" from a female perspective. Although it can be argued that Beverley Simons's Crabdance had a similar intent nine years earlier, Stearns's play is of interest because in it she hard-headedly explores the concept of female sexuality as a "commodity" in a male-controlled world. By extension, Stearns implies, prostitution affects all women because the "business" is weighted in terms dictated by the male world where women are objects of men's desire. In such a world, even a shrewd woman will be exploited because men have more power within society. While not entirely a dramatic success, Hooking For Paradise carefully explores an idealistic philosophy whereby female sexuality would be liberated from male dominance and be reified as a power unto itself. In addition, Stearns draws upon historical fact, setting her play in 1912, during the heydey of rough-and-tumble prairie prostitution. However, Stearns explores this subculture from a female perspective, unlike that well-known documentary of Canadian prostitution, James Gray's Red Lights on the Prairie.[86] Within the play, two views of female prostitution contend: that of the police chief Willy, who sees the bodies of the women working at Rose's Palace on River Street as just another commodity to be bought and sold, no different than drugs, or booze, or horses; and that of Rose's friend Florence, who has "high ideas about men and women," (1) which set prostitutes apart as handmaidens of the moon, in charge of a ceremonial exchange between the sexes which, if conducted properly, would bring dignity and solace to both. Had she been a modern woman, Florence's "high ideas" would place her among the radical feminists, who wish to separate and reify female experience as a means of reclaiming it from its second-class status within a male-dominated world.

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[85] Sharon Stearns, Hooking For Paradise (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1983).

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[86] James Gray, Red Lights on the Prairie (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976).

Caught between these two views is Rose, the madam, who, despite her practical nature, tries to believe in Florence's sense of divine ceremony. In a modern world, Rose would be a liberal feminist, willing to work for her share of the profits within the system as it exists, reluctant to upset the status quo. Rose is more businesswoman than priestess, and when Willy tries to buy her out, she posits an independent woman's argument:

> It's my place. I call the shots. I supply the service. A woman's service. God knows there's few enough businesses a woman can lay claim to but we've always run the hook joints and that's the way it should be. (23)

Rose maintains if Willy ran the house, he'd "be hard and wouldn't understand what it meant to lay yourself out" (24), an argument apparently based on her belief that men and women experience the sexual urge and its gratification differently. When Willy cannot understand what is lacking in his attitude, she explains:

> To be a whore and not only have self-respect but pride in yourself is hard because most men see us as base and fallen women. You included. A piece of wasted flesh just barely good enough for one frantic guilty poke. No matter how well you'd run this place, Willy, that's the kind of attitude you'd bring with you and my girls would start to see themselves in that light. (25)

Of course, Willy proves Rose's analysis is correct when he tells her, "you're too good for this life . . . . With my offer you could set yourself up good. Be a beautiful, wealthy, respectable woman" (25). He wants Rose to conform: then she will be a suitable object of affection, a conventional, "good" woman satisfied to adopt the accepted role of submissive turn-of-the-century female domesticity; he cannot understand the "freedom" being a madam gives her.

Although Spareribs is at age eighteen an angry driven prostitute whose "biggest claim to fame is making thirty joes in one night" (37), she can sometimes find transcendence in her work:

> And before you know it, you're down on the bed and. . . and it's . . . over and . . . it's never as good as you both dreamed and you try some more and you want that moment to be . . . like nothin' ordinary. And then. . . then it's gone. (pause) but that don't matter cause it was so much fun gettin' there. (41)

But Spareribs's attempts to train the novice Maggie, who is only thirteen, reveal that her anger and sense of grievance prevent her from developing Florence's "religious" fervor about prostitution. Flo has rejected marriage as an option because it is "a falsely gilded door with nothing behind but chains that lock our senses and cloud our dreams" (12). Instead of seeing prostitution as a business wherein sexual services are exchanged for money, Florence invests the sexual act with holiness, regarding it as a communion in which women are worshipped:

> We'd make it a ceremony. Something a man could accept properly from us like an ancient gift. It would be their moment. Just one moment. No secret that's theirs to take, to control, to hold on to forever! We'd glitter in heat then be washed away clean, virgin again so there's room for more, and there would always be more. Because of the joy. The beauty. (12)

What Florence imagines sounds much like a return to the ritualized role of the Greek hetaerae, privleged courtesans of wealthy men, but even these women, although protected by law, were not considered free. However, when Rose and Florence attempt to "soar above the sordidness," by beating Willie at his own game, by holding his drugs for ransom, disaster ensues. Perhaps Act Two, Scene Four, hints of the tragedy to come: it is an embarrassingly overwritten scene in which Florence struggles to gird her loins in the mantle of sacred prostitute[87], but in the process indulges in some dreadful purple prosody:

> I am bewildered. Burdened by some dim memory that speaks of ancient sacred rites I cannot manifest in this world. How long? How long before the whore is no longer the Goddess of the Slothful? Before the virgin is no longer a symbol but every woman who truly loves every man?
>
> I wait. I plant a seed. I watch it rot. I plant again. And again I wait. (54)

And even though it is true that Willy "wants to destroy what he can't understand," and Florence sees that man cannot accept the holy hooker's gift because "yielding to a woman means accepting her power and you can't do that," the play posits no solution to the impasse. Sounding much like George Barker in Memories of You, Willy still speaks for many men today when he expresses an echo of the misogynistic views based on the story of Adam and Eve:

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[87] Nancy Qualls-Corbett, The Sacred Prostitute: Eternal Aspect of the Feminine (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1988), p. 12. Qualls-Corbett draws on the Summerians' worship of the goddess Astarte, in which a "the priestess, a sacred prostitute, was tall and exquisitely beautiful . . . . the human woman who embodied the goddess . . . to excite the communication of body and soul." The author says the term "sacred prostitute" presents a paradox to the modern logical mind, which is "disinclined to associate that which is sexual with that which is consecrated to the gods."

> A woman will suck you dry if you let her. As far as sex goes, it's a woman that takes, a woman that puts the mark on a man. (66)

Such a view, whether based on fear of women's demands or a belief in the inferior Otherness of woman, mitigates against any sort of balanced, egalitarian congress -- or commerce, for that matter -- between the two sexes. Willy holds women in contempt and does not imagine they could be equals in an enterprise. While he cannot envision sexual coupling as anything beyond the physical, Rose and Florence seek a man "to accept and revere the power of a woman" (67) in a heightened spiritual atmosphere of mutual vulnerability during the sex act. But the final melodramatic climax of Hooking for Paradise destroys any argument for female superiority: when Rose stabs Willy, she has succumbed to playing his game by commiting an act of violence. At this point, even Florence fails to find any way to comfort Rose or to ennoble what they have done. It can be argued that by devolving into melodrama, a form based on stereotypic male and female role models (the innocent damsel in distress, the square-jawed hero, the black-cloaked villain), Stearns's play is hoist with its own petard, so to speak, and effaces the very theory of equality it promulgates. When Rose says "there's no virtue in this," Florence must admit, "perhaps it's just a murder after all" (72).

Ultimately, perhaps it remains for the audience to decide whether Rose and Florence have failed. True, they have not sold out to the male mercantile view, as represented by Willy, but alas, they have inadvertently resorted to violence, the "masculine" way, as in a Western movie, to solve their dilemma -- as perhaps did Lizzie Borden when faced with stifling circumstances. Hooking For Paradise presents a "problem" in male-female relations, but its having women organize their own exploitation as prostitutes seems a highly unsatisfactory means of bridging the apparent chasm between the two sexes. Florence's philosophy is a thinly disguised version of radical feminism which reifies female experience and thus subtly discounts male autonomy. Perhaps this is "remedial sexism" and preferable to the objectification and exploitation of women, but it does not meet a materialist feminist analysis which would re-order existing society to rid it of exploitive structures, such as prostitution, which debase both men and women. The naive and inconsistent solution Florence posits -- turning prostitutes into priestesses -- seems an unlikely and élitist solution to society's transgressions against women and really does nothing to address the problem of objectification.

iii

A far more convincing -- and excoriating -- view of male-female sexual relations is presented by the late Betty Lambert. Even in a (now somewhat dated) mid-1970s comic view of sexual stereotypes in the commercially successful Sqrieux-de-Dieu[88], by having a wife and mistress swap roles Lambert scores feminist points about the expectations saddling each of the two women, Gracie, the mistress, and Brenda, the wife who finally escapes her role. From there, Lambert moves to a more trenchant and searing critique of society's double standards about female sexuality in two plays produced in the 1980s, Jennie's Story and Under The Skin.[89] Of the two plays, Jennie's Story, first produced in 1981, and a runner-up for both the Chalmers and Governor General's awards, is the more potent and compelling. Pamela Hawthorn says the play's power lies in its ability to draw strong audience response to "the levels of truth in the anger, joy, love and hate that it expresses. The fundamental strength of the play is that it evokes terror and compassion" (8). Lambert herself commented that although she thought her upbringing and education had imbued her with "cunt hatred," she was pleased to find something else in her own work:

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[88] Betty Lambert, Sqrieux-de-Dieu (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976).

> What I've been writing about is women who are struggling -- struggling with their sexuality, with their role and maybe the limitations of their role, but not weakness.[90]

Lambert grew up hearing the story of a woman who had worked for a priest in southern Alberta, was seduced by him and was given a hysterectomy under the province's Sexual Sterilization Act (not repealed until 1971). In her play, Lambert uses the "bare bones" of this true-life story to make several complex points: she critiques the Catholic Church's duplicitous stand on priestly sexuality, the

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[89] Betty Lambert, Jennie's Story & Under The Skin (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1987).

[90] Bonnie Worthington, "Battling Aristotle: A Conversation Between Playwright Betty Lambert and Director Bonnie Worthington," in Room of One's Own, Vol. 82 (July 1983), pp. 54-67.

Church's view of women as passive domestic handmaidens, and women's own acceptance of society's stereotypes about themselves.

Although the play's power is undercut by Lambert's choice to resolve Jennie's dilemma with suicide, in many respects Jennie is a strong female character. At the outset of the play, she brims with vitality and sexual energy; she is a woman happily and fully in control of her domestic realm. Lambert describes her as "sensuous . . . at one with her body" (15). Unhindered by her lack of formal schooling, Jennie has a "sixth sense" about the world around her. Furthermore, Jennie and Harry obviously have a strong relationship, and Harry delights in her earthiness and her powerful intuition about life -- and death:

> Jennie always knows. She's like an old pagan
> lady, my Jennie. (17)

Somehow, Jennie's sixth sense does not tell her the truth about her barrenness -- that her "appendectomy" was actually an operation to sterilize her, surgery in which her own mother was complicit by being manipulated by the Church's need for secrecy. Early in the play, the Church's disrespect for women's work is symbolized when, unlike Harry who removes his boots at the door of Jennie's kitchen, Father Fabrizeau keeps his on when he comes in and sits down at the table, thus tracking up the spotless floor. Jennie's reaction -- to use lye and water to wipe up his footprints, can be interpreted as ironic comment upon the "lie" she has been dealt in life by her mother, by her spiritual leader, and by her church.

In Jennie's husband, Harry McGrane, Lambert presents a compassionate, fully developed character who has not succumbed to the false moralism of the society around him. However, the playwright pulls out the stops with Father Eddie Fabrizeau. A thoroughly loathesome character, the priest is a weak man steeped in misogyny. Fabrizeau blames his victim for his behavior, telling Jennie, "I'm a bad priest an' all for your sake" (29), conveniently forgetting that Jennie was only fifteen when he began having sex with her. Buttressed by his belief that woman corrupts man, rather than feeling shame about his corrosive effect on Jennie's life, he condescendingly tells her, "You don't realize what you've done to me, you poor stupid woman" (31). Fortified by Harry's love and secure in her belief in God's forgiveness because "I done my penance," Jennie has survived the priest's abuse, has given up "measlin," and, as she puts it, has "took back my own nature."

Appallingly Father Fabrizeau's concern is not the state of Jennie's immortal soul, but whether or not "Harry knows," which he does, through gossip and his own intuition, but not because Jennie has told him. According to Jennie's primitive code:

> I kin prove Harry don't know, Father. Because if Harry did know, he'd kill you. (32)

But of course, this is where Jennie begins to go wrong: Harry does not ascribe to that kind of animal territorialism; his spirit is bigger than that, but Jennie later misinterprets this sort of strength as a lack of love. In her own way, Jennie is guilty of certain stereotypes about what "normal" male behavior consists of, thus betraying the bond she has with her husband, who has somehow, miraculously, escaped -- or transcended -- the petty, vindictive thinking of the society which shaped him.

It is clear that "Jennie's story" might have had quite a happy ending had she not succumbed to the belief that since she cannot give her husband children, she is worthless, a failure, a barren husk with nothing to offer. Her acceptance of such fallacious thinking kills her spirit and alienates her from Harry; it leads her, literally, to swallow the lie/lye. But Lambert's play is -- as she intended -- more complex than that, because on another level, Jennie's suicide is a form of revenge and a victory. By choosing to kill herself, Jennie triumphs in a subversive act which undermines the paternalistic assumptions that Father Fabrizeau, in his blind arrogance, enforces among his flock. In her interview with Bonnie Worthington, Lambert describes Jennie as follows:

> She is strong enough for a kind of brief wonderful flare-up where she tells the priest, and curses him. But once she's done it, she can't move out of that. It's complicated. She wants to avenge herself; she wants to do the priest in. She's really very primitive -- and the best vengeance she can think of is for him (Fabrizeau) to have the curse of her suicide on his conscience for the rest of his life. (63)

By having young Molly pick up Jennie's role after her death, Lambert says, she was trying to create a "new form of tragedy," because "women know something that maybe men don't know. We know that after the death, somebody cooks bacon and eggs. And that suicide is not an answer, because life bloody goes on. And on some fundamental level I wanted to break the tragic code." It seems that Lambert has attempted to move Jennie beyond the role of woman-martyr, to give her, to use Keyssar's concept, a transformative experience, to allow her to act and thus at least partially control her fate. Jennie has rejected the outer, public morality, which in any event has betrayed her, in favour of an inner, private code in which she creates her own life's meaning.

In a gesture of defiance repudiating the importance of public appearance, upon her return from the visit to the doctor which finally fully reveals how she has been manipulated and betrayed, Jennie deliberately burns her stylish four-dollar hat. With that act, she leaves the safe domestic world she has conformed to and begins to abide by her own morality, as stipulated by the realities of her own inner world. Jennie withdraws because the world, and the people she trusted, have betrayed her:

> The doctor read it to me. He cut me to stop the transmission of evil. (terrible humour) You allus said God couldn't blame me for the way I was made. I'm not the way God made me, Ma. (small laugh) I still can't take it in. Maybe it's true I'm not bright. It must be true fer people ta sign papers 'n' do that to me. Maybe I'm not bright. But I'm not the other . . . You were my mother! (66)

Edna Delevault has, of course, betrayed her daughter because she is co-opted by the patriarchy's values and thoroughly cowed by the priest's authority. The habit of obedience and fear of scandal overrode her loyalty to her child (and fellow woman), as well as to her sex's procreative role so valued by her Church. No wonder Jennie rejects her past role as dutiful daughter and sends her mother home, refusing to speak to her any longer.

Worse yet, Jennie's bitterness is further compounded when she tells Harry the truth, and he refuses to kill both her and Fabrizeau, which is what her primitive ideal of justice demands. When Jennie chops off her long braid and presents it to her mother, we know she is no longer accessible to conventional -- that is, patriarchal -- ideas of proper feminine behavior:

> I forgive my mother. There. All better now. I give her my hair, all braided neat and nice 'n' tight, like she taught me, to be neat, to be tidy, to be clean. (97)

Wearing the scarf her mother has given her as if it were a "vestment," Jennie takes matters into her own hands in a brutally mock "forgiveness" ceremony. Being a "good Catholic," she says, is "men's business." Her disillusionment attains full flower when she finds out that her marriage cannot be annulled even though the priest lied. The immutable fact that "a priest is a priest" destroys the last chance for her faith:

> Ah. . . That's the way it works, is it. That's the way men work it out together. If I knew and I lied, then Harry could annul me. And if Harry lied, I could annul Harry. But if you know and you lie, and Harry finds out, he can't do nothin' 'cause you're a priest and a priest is a priest. (99)

The monstrous injustice of this double standard chokes off Jennie's faith. Her shedding of her hair is symbolic of her spiritual freedom: she becomes a priestess in her own rites of self, conferring Molly upon Edna as her own daughter. And Jennie becomes fully lost to this world when Fabrizeau further discounts her as a person by saying that what he "did to God" (giving Communion while in mortal sin) was far worse than his repeated coupling with her, coupling that continued even after he had arranged Jennie's "being cut" in order to "stop the occasion of my sin" (102). A furious Jennie rejects his prayers for her soul, demanding honesty instead:

> No, I won't have you kneel down to me, Father, not for my soul. Kneel down for my body! (presses his face against her belly) There, there come to me, poor Eddie. Come to me and I will give you peace. . . . (104)

When Fabrizeau embraces her, it proves his continued weakness in Jennie's eyes. She realizes the last act of resistance left to her is "not to let you have my soul," to thwart the priest where he has always presumed he enjoyed supremacy. And when she presses Fabrizeau to her again, she urges:

> Smell me now . . . Dead flesh. Dead woman flesh. Dead fish in a dead river. Smell me now, Edward Fabrizeau bad man and bad priest. (105)

None of the rituals, the passive roles, or the words of cant work for Jennie any longer, so profoundly has she wrested her autonomy from the grasp of the institutions -- family and Church -- which have so cruelly betrayed her.

This is surely one of the most potent scenes in Canadian theatre, but Lambert's decision not to end the play with Jennie's death both saves it from possible charges of dramatic excess and simultaneously weakens the importance of Jennie's political point. The final scene of Act Two softens the blow for the audience, as it were, allowing its members to carry away the healing image of Molly and Harry courting, despite the tragedy of Jennie's death and his imprisonment for illegally cremating her. Lambert explains her ending as an attempt to create "a female tragic form," which would be antithetical to classic tragedy which focuses on "that lonely individual making that final lofty statement." Instead, what Lambert sought was a more realistic portrayal in which "people pick up the pieces and start to make the funeral feast." She aimed, she said, to make the audience realize Jennie's suicide "was not the answer" (Room of One's Own, 65). To a materialist feminist, however, Lambert's ending weakens the justice of Jennie's rebellion against patriarchy and her repudiation of its norms. Would not her point have been carried more strongly if she had exposed the "bad priest" and educated her mother about the nature of her complicity, then gone on to adopt Molly's baby and live happily with Harry in a new kind of awareness and liberation? Or would that ending have seemed too pat, too happy, for Lambert's critique of society to have been taken seriously?

Lambert once again tackles the issue of male attitudes to female sexuality in Under The Skin, produced posthumously by the New Play Centre in 1985. Again, Lambert drew on actuality for her drama, which is based on a 1980 crime in a Vancouver suburb wherein a neighbor held a young girl as a sexual hostage for six months. Although no drama can approximate the real-life horror of Marc Lepine's December, 1989 slaying of fourteen women in Montreal to settle his grudge against "feminists," Lambert's play explores a similar sort of male pathology which needs female victimization as a means of self-expression. Jerry Wasserman calls Under The

Skin a "glance into the darkness of the human heart."[91] Rating this last play Lambert's best, Wasserman maintains:

> . . . (the play) is a distillation of her own deepest fears: Maggie in the play is a projection of Betty Lambert, middle-class English professor and single mother of a teenage daughter. (217)

Even though the 1989 Theatre Passe Muraille production of Under The Skin brought it a belated Chalmers Award nomination, the play, although suspenseful, is not as multi-layered as Jennie's Story. One of the limitations of the play arises from its very strength: Lambert's decision to focus on the relationship between the mother of the abducted girl and the wife of the abductor rather than the abductor and his victim. Although John Gifford initiates much of the action in the play, he is of necessity a stock figure, incapable of growth or change. Some might even say the foul-mouthed, bullying Gifford is nothing but a macho stereotype. And while the fact that he is the least-interesting character in the play allows the women's relationship centre stage focus, one does want to know more about Gifford's motivation other than that he's angry because Maggie Benton is better educated than he is, jealous of her freedom and professional status, sneers at Anne Frank's ability to forgive her oppressors, and finds pro-rape injunctions in the Bible (179).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Lambert makes a political point with Gifford's characterization: he is there as a foil. He is intended to embody "sick" male attitudes towards women, even though his very one-dimensionality limits the drama at several points. However, Lambert directs the audience's attention away from the usual male focus, concentrating instead on the unfolding relationship between the two female characters -- Gifford's abused wife, Renee, and the couple's next-door neighbor, Maggie, whose daughter Emma is missing. The suspense in the play is not derived from Emma's fate since the audience soon deduces she is encarcerated in Gifford's workshop. Instead, Lambert is interested in exploring the ways in which women can betray each other -- in this case, how a decent woman, herself a mother, can resist knowledge about her own husband in order to preserve her own and her children's stability, no matter how precarious it is or how humiliating its price. Under the Skin, then, lends itself to both a materialist feminist and, perhaps to a lesser extent, a radical feminist critique because of its author's decision to look at women's vulnerability within society and one woman's particularly misogynist marriage. Lambert shows how the nature of their relationships with each other is poisoned and undermined when one of them is too afraid, too dependent, to pursue female solidarity. Thus, the play illustrates how women may be co-opted into passive support for the patriarchy and for violence against other women when their own class situation or financial dependence dictates dependence upon men.

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[91] Jerry Wasserman, editor, Twenty Years at Play: A New Play Centre Anthology (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990), p. 217

John Gifford and the attitudes he embodies designate him as the "villain," of the piece. Lambert never explains how this psychopathic woman-hater with acute sexual-dominance needs got the way he is. Instead, Lambert regards him as a "given," an embodiment of the most extreme aspects of misogyny that are enacted daily in society by rapists, wife batterers and men who would rather kill their wives than grant them a divorce. With her female-centred focus, Lambert is more interested in exploring women's complicity in such situations, their conspiracy in their own degradation. In short, she explores the male-female power imbalance which denies women autonomy in many relationships.

Just as Jennie's mother, in Jennie's Story, succumbs to the priest's authority rather than protect her own defenceless daughter, so Renee functions as a woman who has been co-opted by her husband's hostility towards Maggie. Early in the play she suggests to Maggie that Emma is just "off with some guy she picked up with" (119), an echo of her husband's view that all women are whores and sluts who are "just asking for it." When Maggie says that Emma is overly trusting, Renee retorts:

> You're blind about that girl. You're blind, she was asking for it . . . . The way she carries on, with John. (120)

This is the sort of blame-the-victim thinking we hear later from John, as well, who claims Emma "was always out in the workshop, rubbing up against me" (138). John reveals himself to be prudish and repressive in his sexual thinking, professing shock that Emma knew that Maggie would get her birth control pills when she was sexually active.

Repeatedly, Renee accepts John's abusive treatment of her, submissively waiting on him, flirtatiously calling him her "gruffy bear," fearfully pandering to his moods, stoically absorbing his blows and his insults. As the tension between them grows, John's violence escalates. But, Renee feels helpless in her situation, and with no sense of self, can imagine no way out. As she tells Maggie:

> sometimes peple don't always understand
> the things they get caught up in and
> they just, you know, get caught up in them,
> and they just do it . . . . (147)

So oblique is Renee, so anxious is she to stifle her own self-knowledge (and thus be able to endure living as she does), it is not clear whether she is talking about her own entrapment with John, or John's abduction of Emma, or Maggie's involvement in their world. When Maggie tells Renee she "can't stand the way he treats you" (161), Renee repudiates Maggie's overture and responds masochistically, true to the classic battered-wife syndrome, "You don't understand. I like it." Then, in a line of unreasoning she's learned from John, Renee accuses Maggie of being "green with envy" because she doesn't have a man, doesn't get sex (163). Maggie tells Renee her true feelings:

> You want to know what I've got against John, you really want to know? That night, that night when we had dinner together, he put you down for every single thing you did, he put you down and he smiled this small little complicit smile at me as if I'd understand why he was doing it. This small little you-and-me-babe smile at me." (165)

Maggie correctly identifies John's tactic to pit the two women against each other, his attempt to "win" Maggie to his side by offering her an alliance with his "power" if she insults another woman, but Renee is convinced that Maggie is condescending to her by using words like "complicit." Of course, Renee is afraid, and continues to cleave unto her abuser because she feels helpless, unable to look after herself, to cope alone:

> How am I supposed to go out into the world?
> I can't make it without a man! I can't,
> I don't have your chances. (166)

Lambert is clear-eyed and realistic in this exchange, showing both how education can create class differences that separate women and the way loss of self esteem can render a woman helpless. But then, Renee has been indoctrinated by a master male chauvinist: John has used a variety of tactics to impede genuine friendship between the two women; he has told Renee that Maggie holds her in contempt and thinks her stupid; he has suggested they have a lesbian attachment; he has claimed Maggie is jealous of their marriage and trying to come between husband and wife (something feminists are often accused of). Sadly, in the end, it can be said that John "wins" in the battle against potential female solidarity: when Renee asks Maggie to forgive her for keeping the secret, Maggie replies in justifiable cold rage, "Never" (194).

Under the Skin is a dark play that points up the barriers between women, their complicity in their own abuse, and illustrates how much social power women often concede to men, and how difficult it is to resist corruption by male values and judgements, even when they undermine women's own well-being. In a series of pragmatic interactions, Lambert illustrates the importance of a woman's inner/private strength and direction if she is to withstand the harsh and damning judgements society -- the external/public world dominated largely by male values -- will pass upon her. Because of its woman-oriented focus, its refusal to objectify women through the male gaze, and its examination of the politics of female friendship, Under The Skin is a ferociously feminist play. By revealing the mechanics of family violence and criticising society's tolerance for it, the play is perhaps even more relevant now than when it was first produced. Instead of making statements, it illustrates that in cases where "man" is truly the enemy, it takes an inordinate amount of strength for women to resist being controlled and take action to seize responsibility for their own lives -- and those of their children.

iv

No Canadian playwright seems to understand -- or deal so fearlessly -- with the visceral realities of human sexuality as does Judith Thompson. And yet, apparently paradoxically, the true site of much of the "action" in Thompson's plays is actually her characters' unconscious, that dark and private world which, through monologue and imagistic outpourings, the playwright is able to bring into the public ken. Nevertheless, Thompson is difficult to "place" as a feminist playwright. Her inclusion in this thesis serves to reveal how a woman playwright may deal sympathetically with both male and female realities, and show the pain and entrapment of each. None of Thompson's wildly variegated cast of characters stands on stage expressly to make pointed declamations about social, sexual, or economic oppression, but that topic can be found as a subtext in all her plays to date. That subtext is written, it can be argued, by the types of marginal characters -- the retarded, the visionary, the nearly mad, the childlike -- that Thompson places at the centre of her dramas. Even when she portrays characters who conform, who reflect ordinary middle-class ambitions, as does Cape in White Biting Dog, what Thompson is bent on revealing is chaos underneath the facade of order; the utterance untempered by reason; the private terror that breaks through life's mundane public surface. Consequently, her plays are pervaded by a sense of the surreal, even when she is conveying the gritty realities of The Crackwalker. Furthermore, Thompson's emphasis upon the power of sexual urges suggests a Jungian view of the libido as a source of force or urgency, a general psychic energy which will out even if consciously denied.[92]

Thompson made her mark with her first play, The Crackwalker, which explored the limited options of a retarded native woman named Theresa, whose muddled bid for happiness goes grotesquely awry when her unbalanced "husband" strangles their baby.[93] When the play was first produced in November, 1980, by Theatre Passe Muraille, some critics professed themselves appalled by its street language, disadvantaged characters, and grim ending. Despite the profoundly depressing lives of Theresa and Alan, and their friends, Sandy and Joe, Thompson's unpatronizing tone imbues her characters with their own brand of skewed dignity. Even as The Crackwalker conveys the unredeemedly grotty world of Theresa and her friends, it elicits empathy for human lives so limited and blunted by poverty, lack of social skills, brutality, and ignorance.

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[92] Christopher F. Monte, Beneath The Mask: An Introduction to Theories of Personality, Third Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1987), pp. 236-37.

[93] Judith Thompson, "The Crackwalker" in The Other Side of the Dark (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1989), pp. 19-71.

Thompson has never been one to spare critics' sensibilities or to sidestep grim realities on behalf of a squeamish audience. Her second play, White Biting Dog, premièred at Tarragon Theatre in 1984 and won the Governor General's Award for drama that year. And I Am Yours was a runner-up in the 1987 Floyd. S. Chalmers Canadian Play Awards. Taken together, these three plays present an uncompromising view of female sexuality. Although none of her female characters ever utters a polemical feminist speech, each is implicated in situations which push the audience to contemplate unnerving and unpalatable aspects of human interrelatedness. One of the strengths of Thompson's plays is her ability to write powerful monologues which make public her characters' private and intensely idiosyncratic images, fears, and dreams. Thompson's monologues are always compelling, revealing inner landscapes rife with unusual visions, bizarre nightmares, and exceptional associations. Through her characters' descriptions of these inner realities, Thompson manages to bring the swirling, inchoate world of their unconscious on to the stage, frequently leaving the audience shaken and/or perplexed by the violence such representation unleashes. By making the inner and private so resoundingly public, Thompson manages to make statements that transcend personal experience, that speak powerfully about the broader human condition in a way which redefines the process of rendering the personal political.

In a March, 1988, article in Books in Canada, Thompson explains how she achieves her plays' powerful pastiche:

> The whole of I am Yours is composed of collected images. . . . It takes me years to collect images. . . . I see something in the subway. I hear about a friend's grandmother. A lot of people -- this terrifies me -- assume that my plays are confessional, autobiographical somehow. I would never be so dreary as to bore the public with my own life or problems.[94]

The images Thompson collects, she says, are all covering for the play's "substance," which she defines as an "ineffable kind of thing that I'm pursuing, that I know is inside me" (11). And because her plays draw from the caves of the subconscious, and seem to unfold in an unpredictable and dream-like fashion, they thwart conventional expectations of plot and climax. One can not say Thompson's plays have no plot or logic, but it is plot and logic unto the dream sequence or the inner imaginings of a particular character -- the unexpected which occurs when the interior is made exterior.

In The Crackwalker, which lends itself to a materialist feminist critique, both female characters' lives are limited by poverty and lack of opportunity, yet they possess an amazing kind of gusto. Sandy and Theresa are marginal and oppressed, and yet they appear undaunted, protected by a terrible sort of innocence. And although Sandy and Theresa are victimized, they are not simply passive victims: When Joe beats up Sandy after she confronts him about his sexual escapade with Theresa, she gets her revenge on him by gouging his back with her spike-heeled shoe while he is passed out! Although Sandy hurls invective at Theresa, calling her a "whoredog hounddog . . . cowpie," (20) she is also quick to forgive her friend and allow her to come back and sleep on the couch because she likes "the company" Theresa provides, even if she is "just a little slow" (25). This is a far more genuine sort of female solidarity than, for instance, the uneasy and occasional friendship between Maggie and Renee in Under the Skin. When Joe and Alan arrive with their hot motorcycle, the women's place in their world becomes clear from the endearments Joe applies to Sandy: she goes from being "honey suck" and "sugar crack," to "shit-for-brains" when she challenges him on his gambling activities. The border between chauvinistic tolerance and violent abuse is very thin and easily transgressed; when Sandy presses her case, Joe spits a mouthful of beer over her and calls her "bitch" (27). The relationship between the sexes here is clearly both compulsive and adversarial, with bouts of brief, uneasy truce alleviating the hostilities. Joe's biggest fear is that the two women will "gang up on me," and Alan responds "Two women together always do." But both male characters' bravado is but a thin veneer atop their myriad insecurities. Joe is enraged that Sandy has believed Theresa's story about the rape because, after all, Theresa is nothing but a "fuckin' retard." Sandy becomes complicit in her own oppression by joining the male view of man as owner, woman as object: she says she only believed Theresa because she was jealous, because Joe said he liked "pokin her better" (30).

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[94] Nigel Hunt, "In contact with the dark, " in Books in Canada (Toronto: Canadian Review of Books, March, 1988), Volume 17, Number 2, pp. 10-12.

The male solidarity between Alan and Joe, however, is breached by the former's feeble attempt at chivalry. Alan defends Theresa when Joe claims she's lied about his raping her. Acting on his own fuzzily grasped, inarticulate concept of appropriate masculine behavior, Alan assumes responsibility for Theresa:

> I'll be stayin with her all the nights
> from now I'm gonna take care of her it
> won't happen again she won't never say
> nothin bout ya again I promise. (30)

In return for "protection," Alan expects Theresa to become his mute object. In a stunningly acute and therefore powerfully depressing revelation of how the power balance often operates in male-female relationships, Thompson unerringly sets out the elements of delusion in this doomed liaison. Once the childlike Theresa "belongs" to Alan, he is able to indulge all his romantic fantasies about her; he calls her his "angel," telling her how beautiful she is, admitting he "wanted to marry ya when I seen ya." And although she is "slow," Theresa understands her role in this fantasy: Once she realizes that Al wants babies, she has to lie about losing the "other" baby in her past because she was "unfit." To be honest would be to shatter Alan's image of her as looking "just like the madonna" (36). And of course, the madonna is one end of the madonna/whore polarity that is so often the basis of the patriarchy's reaction to female sexuality. While the Christian ethic clearly sees the conflation of woman's sexuality into the maternal/madonna role as positive, the limitations of such objectification are no less stifling than being seen as solely a temptress/whore. In fact, each is the oppressive flip side of the other.

Always sources of conflict in The Crackwalker are the unchallenged -- even unrecognized -- expectations men and women have of each other, best illustrated by the male characters' behavior, which see-saws precariously between chauvinism and chivalry. Both the men and the women are trapped: Sandy worries that she might be "gettin ugly lookin" (42) because then her value will dissipate in Joe's eyes; Alan is afraid he'll be thought a "fag" and a "wimp" for, as Sandy says, "not acting like a fuckin man" when he remembers his father's death (44). And it is clear from the outset that Theresa and Al's stab at being a "family" is doomed because each is hobbled by horrendously unrealistic expectations. When Al is fired from his dishwashing job, all the "ugly thoughts" he has been fighting off assume greater power. The less he is in control of his life, the more he tries to control his family, throwing all Danny's medicine out the window because "no fuckin social worker's gonna fuckin tell me how to run my fuckin life" (61).

The entire dynamic of The Crackwalker builds to one inevitable conclusion: the "sacrifice" of the "madonna's" child. Even though

Theresa resists Al's efforts to "doctor" the baby himself, her objections are impotent both because she is a "stupid woman" and because Al is the "great father." Al is confident that slathering Danny with Vicks vapour rub is the cure-all for his illness:

> If it's good enough for my old man it's
> good enough for my baby Therese. (63)

Alan has no power in the outside world, but according to the brutal credo of manhood that's shaped him, he has the right to hold sway over his private domain. Thompson makes brutally clear just how far Alan will go to enforce his will when Theresa resists his lovemaking because she hasn't had her new IUD installed yet. His angry, proprietary attitude towards her reinforces her status as object:

> Fuck the goddamn doctors! Goddamn doctors
> trying to run my life saying I can't make
> love to my own woman to my own wife fuck
> em fuck em I don't care if you get pregnant
> we're gonna do it when we want and no doctor's
> gonna tell us nothin. (64)

There we have a stark portrayal of the sexual bravado of a mentally troubled, sexually and socially impotent male. Provoked by all the outside meddling, Alan soon forgets Theresa is his "madonna" and strikes her, screaming, "You stupid dumb cunt Indian bitch fat retarded whore." Alan first lapses into child-like self-pity, saying "alls I wanted was a little lovin," and then blame, accusing Theresa of "making the baby cry."

When Alan stops the baby's crying by strangling it, he has a bizarre explanation for the infant's sudden silence, claiming he is a "good father," and the child ceased wailing "cause I told him he was gonna get a Monte Carlo" (65). Unable to cope with the here and now, Alan can only make improbable promises about the future. And in dreadful synchronization with Alan's version of reality, when Theresa finally realizes the baby is dead and confronts Alan, her greatest outrage seems to be that he's failed as a father because he lied to Danny about giving him a Monte Carlo. Putting the baby's death behind her because she knows her life must move along, Theresa plans her next allegiance -- with "Ron Harton he better than you he not stoppem breathin" (66). When Sandy tries to get Theresa to get her to leave with the dead baby, she threatens to tell Ron "what ya done down at the Lido" (67). In Theresa's value system, "blowin off old queers for five bucks," would endanger her position more with Ron than would carrying her dead baby around in a plastic bag. And Alan's concern is not for the baby either; he feels his manhood is in question because Theresa doesn't seem to believe "I could drive a Monte Carlo. Easy" (69). There is no way to tell Theresa's story prettily, no basis for giving it a happy ending. And Sandy will follow Joe out to Calgary, knowing it'll "be no different" there for her, because she sees that reality can't be sanitized:

> They had them flowers round Danny's
> neck so's to hide the strangle but
> I seen it. The flowers never hid it
> they just made ya look harder, ya know?
> They just made ya look harder. (71)

And that is Thompson's role as a playwright: to present the unadorned and horribly painful truths of her characters' realities and "make ya look harder" at their humanity. And, amazingly, even amidst their blundering pain, the characters sometimes glimpse their own unique humanity and that flash of light seems to keep them going. Even though Alan has killed his child, Sandy will still "stand up" for him. She says she cannot judge because:

> I still consider him a friend. No matter what he done, nobody can say what happened in that room. . . . (71)

And Alan seems to have left Theresa something worthwhile, despite his abuse of her. Her very last words in the play suggest she remembers when he loved her, when she had the chance to be transformed into someone else:

> Stupid old bassard don't go foolin with
> me you don't even know who I look like
> even. You don't even know who I lookin like. (71)

In both White Biting Dog and I Am Yours, Thompson tackles families in disarray and beset with internal strife. And in both dramas, the male characters are at sea and confused by the events around them while the female characters -- even if mad or doomed to death -- frequently take charge of the action, albeit often with disastrous consequences. Both plays depict human sexuality as plagued by contradictions: it can provide salvation both for oneself or others, or it can be a lethal burden. In White Biting Dog, women are presented as both saviour (Pony) and seductress (Lomia), in a further exploration of the madonna/whore dichotomy, while the male characters are amorphous, assuming whatever shape is necessary to achieve their ends, yet dependent upon the women in their lives. Cape is described in the list of characters as "compulsively seductive, extremely charming and manipulative," while the dying Glidden "wants desperately for his life to be like a Norman Rockwell painting."[95] Furthermore, "salvation" is seen by Cape, and his father Glidden too, to a lesser extent, to lie within women's purview. Glidden "has no reason to live," now that Lomia's left him, and once Cape accepts the white dog's message that his "mission" is to save his father by reuniting his parents, he abandons thoughts of suicide and begins to believe "if I save HIM, I save my*self*" (7). Cape recognizes himself as an empty vessel who had to "fake" all his interaction with other people.

His entire life, including his marriage, was a facade:

> I couldn't keep it up, so at night in my home, I would sit in the dark on the living room brown shag carpet and Janis would sit in the kitchen, under the light . . . brushing her hair. Just brushing and brushing and brushing. (7)

What a picture of bleak domesticity: the passive husband, the modern Rapunzel who will never be rescued.

When Pony stumbles into Cape's frenzied effort to save his father, Cape interprets her song to her dead dog Queenie as a sign that she is "an unknowing agent of the dog" (11). And his assumption is buttressed when he learns Pony was an "ambulance man" for four years and thus has a great deal of life-saving experience. A "neat bar" who likes order, Pony quit the ambulance business because it was too disorganized, and now runs her "own fix-it stand, for things though, eh, not people, up at the mall, out in Mississauga" (14). Nevertheless, she knows she's cut out for bigger things and uses her psychic abilities (". . . up in Kirkland, whenever I wanted the traffic light to change I'd just press my bumcheeks together . . . it worked every time.") to help Cape (19). There is a eerie kind of eclectic flakiness about Pony, and yet she's obviously more competent and intelligent than Sandy or Theresa. She has a quality of almost-knowingness, rather like someone naturally intuitive whose reading material runs to nothing but new-age self-help books and horoscopes. She might be regarded as an untutored radical feminist with strong feelings but no firmly developed philosophical base.

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[95] Thompson, *White Biting Dog* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1984).

Pony's inwardness is self-preoccupied, but she can also relate to others. The only problem is, Pony's senses say the return of Glidden's estranged wife Lomia is the only thing that can save him, and Cape hates his mother:

> He was turned to mush and it's her fucking fault its FUCK HER. You know what I'd do if my dream came true? I'd like to get on National TV and tell them how she made me drink my own nose bleeds from fruity jam jars. She did! And she farts like no person should . . . . (21)

Cape's words are imbued with a powerful misogyny which seems based upon Lomia's physical self and her betrayal, as he sees it, of her role of wife and mother. And when Lomia arrives, she turns out to be a person "obsessed by her own physical being," and "buffeted by sensation." Like Theresa, she is so self-obsessed, she has no sense of personal physical boundaries. Just as Theresa boasts to Alan about the size of her bowel movement, so Lomia maintains she loves "being inside my six layers of skin . . . everytime I breathe I

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sort of -- breathe out seeds, seeds. . . . inside I feel like . . . sewage" (68). She seems to be boasting about her own earthy fecundity. No wonder the impotent, fading Glidden is dying in her absence, needs to immerse himself in peat moss to keep going. However, Lomia has no symbiosis with her husband; Glidden, she tells Cape, is like "codeine" to her while Pascal "spikes my blood." In short, Glidden offers Lomia no sexual highs. Pony describes Lomia as a " truly beautiful lady" who's "got kinda a profound fume about her" (41). And Pony, who is so direct and open, sees that although Cape says he hates his mother, "then I see ya with her and it seems like ya really like her" (41). In fact, Lomia (whose name suggests loam, that particularly fertile soil so excellent for gardening) frightens Cape; he is entrapped by his incestuous attraction to her fecund powers, her devouring Earth Mother aura. She calls him "Sonny," and calls Pascal, her much younger lover, "that boy." But as Lomia admits just before Cape kisses her at the end of Act One, she can't feel: her emotions are trapped in "thick pitch" inside (56). (Rather like a tar pit?)

Making love to Pony brings Cape back to some realization of women's humanity. As Glidden rushes around making his celebratory lunch, Cape confesses:

> . . .women to me were just sort of cysts -- dermoid cysts? I read about them, they're female hormones, just hair and oil and teeth, all in a -- cyst -- hah. That's all women were to -- me. That's all. (59)

What a repulsive view of women: mindless, heartless, soulless, inanimate matter, just rather repugnant, perverse growths. However, entering Cape's world is dangerous for Pony, who unlike Lomia has a desire to nurture and who realizes that transformation has a price: "the old me is getting killed off by the new me" (78). Furthermore, her new self frightens Pony because by entering into Cape's compulsive world, she has given up her own values and "would do anything" for him. She is, in fact, losing herself even as she "saves" Cape. The cost of such nurturance is great, too great, and a materialist-feminist analysis revolts at such female martyrdom -- unless Thompson (as Lambert does in the case of Jennie) is here making an ironic point (which does not seem in keeping with the previous tone of this play).

The final scene of White Biting Dog suggests we must regard as positive Pony's reversion to her childhood self and her ultimate decision to hang herself as a way to keep the "badness" at bay and simultaneously "give" herself to Cape forever. Thompson suggests Pony's suicide is her way of holding on to her purity in face of Cape's brutally opportunistic seduction of Pascal and his admission that he cannot truly love her as he is not like other men. Similarly, when Glidden learns that Lomia's desire to return to him is predicated upon Pascal's departure, he can no longer be part of the lie and succumbs to his illness. Both Lomia and Cape are alike: they are hollow and feed upon others. In Lomia's case, Pascal's degradation of her ("when you treated me like fecal matter, the pins and needles would start") proved she could feel something (87). Cape tells Pony she "didn't have to," die for him, but Lomia answers that both Glidden and Pony died "because they. . . loved.

. . us, I guess." Like them, the audience is left mired in uncertainty as to whether "it will make . . . any . . . difference" (108).

Thompson continues her immersion in the domestic world in I Am Yours.[96] Here we find the same confusion about how to nurture and how to love as in I Am Yours, with elements of the same working-class obsessiveness of The Crackwalker's Alan and Joe reflected in the caretaker, Toilane. In this play, also, Thompson explores the conflict between the impetus to mother, as represented by Toilane's controlling mom Pegs, who seems to be the obverse of Lomia, and the nature of female sexuality, as reflected in both Mercy and Dee. Just as Lomia is dependent upon unhealthy liaisons for her sexual identity, so is Mercy chained to male sexual desire in order to feel validated. Thompson suggests that Mercy has never recovered from not being her father's "favorite," but fatherly love appears not to have protected the increasingly maddened Dee from disaster either. And again, Thompson's male characters are victims, of their own masculinity and their own obsessive sexual relationships with women. Both Toilane and Mack are equally at the mercy of Dee's whims, and Toilane bears the added burden of his mother's expectations of him. Just as Mercy is haunted by dreams of her past sexual encounters, so is Dee -- far more seriously -- haunted by "the creature" of destruction which "torments her imagination," which she struggles to keep behind the "wall" of her unconscious.

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[96] Thompson, "I Am Yours," in The Other Side of the Dark (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1989), pp. 119-176.

Each of the three women in I Am Yours is wounded or encumbered by her sexuality: Mercy by her need for a father figure/lover; Dee by the "animal" part of her self she strives to stifle in order to maintain Mack's love for her; and Pegs by her over-burgeoning maternal love. However, Thompson presents men as also entrapped by their need for the female or for a female self. Just as Glidden was the "homemaker" in White Biting Dog, so is Mack the conciliator in his relationship with the crazed Dee. Even Raymond, in seducing 15-year-old Mercy, is not seen solely as an exploiter. (It is interesting to note that James Brown's Prisoner of Love is playing during the initial depiction of Mercy's and Raymond's "sex scene." The obvious question is, who is a prisoner of whom?) Certainly both Mack and Toilane are in thrall to their love for Dee, but she also is imprisoned by the demands and expectations such love brings.

Deirdre's struggle to paint can be interpreted as a bid for freedom, an attempt to liberate herself from her inner "animal" by expressing it on the canvas. Just as Sandy tells Joe she has a "fucking hole in my gut cause of you" (57), so Mack tells Dee he's suffering from a "burning hole" because he cannot understand why their marriage broke up (124). And, again, people's motives can be confused: did Dee break up with Mack because she "just fell out of love" (125) or because she is trying to save him from meeting her animal? Or is spurning Mack's love a way of "cutting [her] own face," by thwarting her physical need for his love? What the untutored Toilane offers Dee is the chance to "let her go," to explore that primal "somepin" they both have in common (132). There is no doubt that Toilane is sincere in his attachment to Dee, but even a man as simple-minded as he is feels confident he knows what's best for a woman:

> I think you don't know what you want.
> I think from what I seen in there,
> that I'm what you wanted all your life. (137)

Toilane can't imagine how complex or befuddled Dee is; he assumes blunt sexuality will sort her out, and that eventually she'll "come to (her) senses," and accept him as the solution to her life's woes. However, like Theresa, Toilane's innocence, and the honesty of his passion, however ill-advised, makes him a sympathetic character, always in the clutches of some person or feeling he cannot master or even understand adequately. In the same way, one cannot help feeling compassion for Dee, even when she treats Mack so cruelly. Even though there is rivalry between Dee and Mercy, there is also a bond, and Dee is able to confide to her sister:

> Merc, you know that fear I used to have of an animal? . . . Yeah, well it's like something's happened to me. It's like it got out of the wall. Like a shark banging at the shark cage and sliding out. Out of the wall and inside me. I feel something taking over. . . . (140)

Even though she wants nothing more to do with Toilane, Dee cannot abort the fetus he has left in her womb. At the hospital, she hears the baby "talking" to her and "breathing in (her) ears" (143) Even in her distraught state, Thompson suggests, Dee's impulse to support life -- even if she plans to give the baby away -- is stronger than her impulse for destruction, stronger than the force of her ravening animal.

But in Pegs, a devouring, overweening mother figure, Thompson creates a character stronger than Dee's primal self, a bullying, headstrong woman whose private notion of class resentment and faith in blood ties is bigger than the middle-class intimidation Dee and Mercy concoct in court. And yet, Pegs is also a touching character, especially in her hurt-angry-bewildered "motherhood" speech to an unresponsive cab driver:

> It comes as quite a shock to us, you know, us girls who been brought up to think family is our whole life and ya grow up and ya get married and ya start havin kids and you are in your prime, man, everybody on the street smiles, they respect ya, you're the most powerful thing there is, a mother . . . . And then they get older, ya go back to work, and it's their friends, their friends are more important than you, than anything in the world . . . . and it seems they only talk to you if it's to get money or the car . . . . And ya never see em, and ya wonder if they hate you. . . . Why is that? Why don't they like you anymore? (151)

Unlike either Mercy, who has had three abortions, or Dee, who plans give her baby up for adoption, Pegs has made a career of motherhood. She sees the power she had as a "madonna" figure, and she does not surrender her role easily. She is a radical feminist without even knowing it. Furthermore, she is the "enforcer," for lack of a better term, of conventional ideals of masculinity and responsibility in Toilane's life. Yet she really does not want him to become independent, and invades his apartment with instructions about his dirty socks and orders that he begin his Christmas shopping:

> . . . we'll go for a bite, and then, we'll

> start our Christmas shopping! . . . Well
> it's the third Sarrday in October for
> buggy's sake, if ya don't start now
> you'll never get it done. (127)

Behind this bluster, Thompson skillfully implies, is also a lonely aging woman who has no other source of self-worth than in her role as mother to a recalcitrant son. When she finds Toilane weeping after Dee has dismissed him, she chivvys him with her expectations of masculine behavior, saying "I don't think you'd want your father to see you take it lying down" (147). Even though Toi's father is a criminal who died after a 20-year jail sentence, Pegs still invokes him as an icon of traditional male conduct. And Pegs's anger and incitement propels Toilane to pursue custody of the baby Dee is carrying. Left to his own devices, it is doubtful he would have got himself organized enough to appear in court or "declare war" on the "upper classes." Pegs appeals to the tribal instinct in her son:

> Are you gonna let the high classes chew
> ya up and spit ya out? Are you gonna let
> them take your baby? . . . . THEY HAVE US
> BELIEVIN WE CAN'T TALK, WE CAN'T DRESS,
> AND NOW THEY HAVE YOU BELIEVIN YOU DON'T
> HAVE A RIGHT TO YOUR CHILD! If you don't
> fight for your child you're worth even
> less than they think. (160)

Within this speech, Thompson imbeds a clear and angry Marxist-feminist analysis of the flaws at the heart of middle-class North America. It is Pegs's idea to go have "tea" with Mercy and Dee after the court case; she still has not abandoned the idea of some kind of "justice" on her terms, and presses for some kind of redress, based on her prerogative as a mother:

> Toilane knows he mighta made a mistake . . . I do, however, think it would be a nice gesture if you . . . admit, just for me bein his mum, that my son did not assault you. (167)

When Dee resists, Pegs deliberately "occupies" the apartment, forcing her presence upon the sisters as Dee's labour begins. It is clear, by this point, that Toilane may be cowed, but Pegs is not; so the snatching of the baby comes as no surprise. Even if Toilane loves little Tracy Meg, he is clearly unable to care for her, It's difficult to think of a more poignant ending than Thompson gives us: Toi in the hotel room, "holding the baby, bewildered, calling, "Mum?" with Pegs either "passed out or maybe dead in chair" (176). Pegs's willpower has taken Toilane this far, but we know he cannot proceed without her, and we don't wish even to imagine how the baby will fare in his care. The equal tragedy in the play is that Dee feels "purified" -- through birth -- and also through understanding her self-hatred. It is as if her "animal" has been released. She is now able to love after having grappled with her shadow self. But the Jungian purgation comes too late: she has no baby left to care for, and Mack has lied to her about the baby's whereabouts.

Mercy, on the other hand, is left with her unappeased hunger for love, with her sense of need, which Raymond may not be able to meet. Of all the female characters in I Am Yours, Mercia is the most pathetic: as Pegs is the mother prototype, so Mercy represents unbridled female sexual need because she never felt loved as a child and still does not as an adult. Mercy recalls her awakening at fifteen as "an egg cracking open in my belly pouring out all this like . . . honey everywhere (133). But just as her father let her down by giving Dee the locket reading Ich Bin Dein, so her husband Tony withholds himself from her:

> He had this thing, you know? Where we could only have sex once a week, every Sunday, between the news and the late movie? And once, I think it was Wednesday or Thursday, after work, I had these white pantyhose on and I was feeling, you know, horny? So he was lying there on the bed watching TV. . . and I you know, climbed on top of him . . . well he threw me right off him and starts yelling 'It's Thursday, it's Thursday, you cow, not Sunday, so don't pressure me . . . . (140)

Tony's demonstration of his power over Mercy by callously disregarding her enables him to continue watching The Brady Bunch (brilliant ironic juxtaposition there!) while Mercy is "moaning and groaning." The scene is pathetic, grotesque and sadly funny, all at once -- and a neat/nasty upset of the "typical" bedroom scene when, as social myth has it, it is the woman who withholds sex. Mercy's loneliness and need is so great that she will even proposition her brother-in-law Mack upon meeting him at the bus depot. Even after Mack and Dee are reconciled, Mercy asks Mack to kiss her because, "Nobody's kissed me in so long. My husband never kissed me not for years, we'd just do it in the dark facing separate directions. Please?" (149). However, even though her "animal" of sexual need makes her pathetic sometimes, Mercy is less frenzied than Dee, who struggles to repress her animal. Thompson's play clearly argues for an integration of the Jungian shadow world, or "animal" with the conscious world, but it is a move none of her characters achieves with any degree of success.

Thompson is a challenging, innovative, elusive playwright to discuss, and her work, because of the very success of its exploration of "inner darkness," resists analysis. In such plays as The Crackwalker, she seems sympathetic to the interests of materialist feminist critics; at other times, in plays like I Am Yours, her political analysis, as voiced through the mouths of characters like Pegs, sounds radical. Although Thompson's plays are so allusive and dreamlike, they seem to proceed by indirection, at the same time, their action appears carefully orchestrated and is structured to draw the audience irrevocably into the surreal world of its characters. And behind all this is, unmistakably, a feminine intelligence concerned with the importance of women's roles, their sexuality and their inner lives. Hard to categorize though Thompson may be, she does, in the final analysis, write feminist plays where women characters "star" in their own lives, however meagre, and possess an indomitable kind of vitality.

This chapter has attempted to show Canadian women playwrights' efforts to open dramatic discussion on the topic of female sexuality and the stifling myths which have long kept it a taboo topic on stage unless presented through a male observer's view. Margaret Hollingsworth shows that lesbian love affairs are prone to similar stresses of power struggles and selfishness as their heterosexual counterparts. In her plays Alli Alli Oh and Islands, Hollingsworth also explores female self-image and finds that characters like Alli may be so crippled by their distaste for their own femaleness that they may not be able to enjoy passion with another. In Sharon Stearns's Hooking for Paradise, a solution to the power imbalance between men and women is sought in the elevation of women's sexuality, but instead the would-be hetaerae resort to violence and destroy themselves. An in-depth and convincing exploration of the power and pain of female sexuality is found in the plays of Judith Thompson and Betty Lambert. Both have created strong, vibrant dramas where women refuse to be controlled by societal norms which are based on a male interpretation of appropriate female response -- even when men use power (as in the case of the priest who abuses Jennie) or violence (as in the abductor of Maggie's daughter Emma) to "have their way" with the women they know and unscrupulously exploit.

CHAPTER V

> "My mothers did not enjoy the privilege of being born Canadian. They did not enjoy the privilege of access to libraries, a liberal education, or any of the amenities of being born Canadian. They still do not enjoy life in this country. No great novels of the struggle of humankind for justice, liberation and equality dotted the landscape of their academic life, only the robes of the church, the songs of Gregorian priests and the great common kitchens and agricultural fields of industrial residential schools existed for them . . . ."
>
> Lee Maracle in Telling It[97]

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The past twenty years have seen immense increases in the number of First Nations representatives seeking vocations as artists -- as painters, actors, novelists, poets and playwrights -- across Canada. While this increase does nothing to cancel out the fact of Native Canadians' relative artistic silence within the cultural mainstream for the past 400 years, nor does it in any way rectify long-standing Aboriginal grievances, it does offer hope for the future. And it is particularly encouraging to note that among the flowering of Native writers, are many articulate Native Canadian women. Writers such as Jeannette Armstrong, Marie Baker, Beth Brant, Maria Campbell, and Lee Maracle are giving voice to the experience, mythology and awareness of Native women, breaking a too-lengthy silence with fresh and honest writing. This chapter examines ways English-Canadian drama reflects the growing articulation of Native concerns. Its analysis begins with The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, a "landmark" play about a Native woman by a white, male playwright, then explores The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, two successful, well-received plays about modern reservation life by a Native male playwright. Both Ryga and Highway are important playwrights handling Native issues in contrasting ways: both are female-focused but tend to regard women as powerless -- although Highway, as befits a younger writer, shows that women can evolve from passive to active roles. Ryga wrote his play to "educate" white audiences; Highway has been criticised for catering to the same spectators. From this definite male view, the chapter's discussion proceeds to the richer scope and feminist perspective of female writers, moving to Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, a humorous, politicized encapsulation of Native women's history written by a Native actress/playwright, and ending with Jessica, a collaborative work written by a Métis activist and a white actress/playwright, a play with a strong emphasis on the power of feminine Native spirituality, a resource untapped by Ryga.

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[97] Lee Maracle, "Ramparts Hanging in the Air," in Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990), p. 164.

Described as George Ryga's "foremost legacy,"[98] The Ecstasy of Rita Joe was commissioned as a centennial project and first presented on November 23, 1967, by Vancouver's Playhouse

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[98] Gary Boire, "George Ryga: A Tribute," Canadian Literature, 118, Autumn 1988, pp. 189-191.

Theatre Centre. The production was later remounted, July 9, 1969, as part of the festival celebrating the opening of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Obviously, since then, much of the "context" surrounding the play has greatly changed as history has moved forward and Native expectations have evolved.[99] That is to say, the issues in Native politics have developed since the late sixties; the past two decades' radical politicization of many Native leaders, as well as the increased education and awareness of members of the Native community itself, especially Native women, means that today Aboriginal people neither want nor need others to speak for them. And many writers are wisely reluctant to do so, particularly in light of recent debates within the national literary community over "mainstream" writers "usurping" the stories of "marginated" cultures.

However, twenty-four years ago, native activism was just beginning: colonization was the new "buzz word" used in political rhetoric about the plight of Canada's natives; today, the phrase most called upon is cultural appropriation. The change indicates a deeper understanding of both the complexity of the issue and the inappropriateness of whites speaking for Natives or describing their realities. In 1967, a white woman, Frances Hyland, played Rita Joe. Today, theatre companies would have no difficulty finding competent, experienced Native actors to fill such roles. And although Rita Joe's non-linear plot development and neo-Brechtian structuring, using songs to comment upon dramatic events, was innovative for its time, expectations have changed since the advent of both Native activism and feminism, and the play's flaws show. Ryga's sincere intention was to shock the Canadian public with an uncompromising picture of Natives' plight in an urban milieu. However, to read The Ecstasy of Rita Joe in 1991 is to experience an artifact of a bygone era. The play offers Rita Joe no chance for transformation, only a death as an unsung victim of white society. Rita Joe is a symbol, not a fully articulated character; she is powerless in the grip of a culture that reviles her, and she has no understanding of her own plight, no opportunities for self-empowerment.

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[99] Eleanor Wachtel, "Two Steps Backward from the One Step Forward," Canadian Theatre Review, 43, Summer 1985, pp. 12-30. Wachtel cites Sondra Segal and Roberta Sklar in "The Women's Experimental Theatre, The Drama Review, Winter 1983, who state that, "Theatre does not exist in a historical vacuum. It is not pure, free of its time. It springs from a desire to recognize one's own experience, have it, value it, express it, see it flower. Women seek a subjective dialogue with and response to the world we live in -- in other words, to recognize and express the recognition that we are participants in the world." That observation is particularly true for activist Native women writers.

Gary Boire's 1988 tribute to Ryga (who died in November of 1987) observes that The Ecstasy of Rita Joe "marked a certain coming-of-age in Canadian theatre," and the play's historical importance is still valid in 1991. However, a materialist feminist reading indicates that, although Ryga used a female protagonist as the ostensible focus of the play, his play cannot be termed feminist: Rita Joe is a woman acted upon, rather than an protagonist pursuing her own destiny; she is a passive pawn in the grip of events far beyond her ken, much less her control. A genuine victim of her own time and place in the Canadian mosaic, a casualty of her own race, culture and gender, Rita is no hero for today's Native women, nor is it fair to expect her to be. The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, despite Ryga's obvious sympathy for and outrage at the poignant tragedy of Rita's short, brutally concluded life, was intended as a socialist, not a feminist, critique of white society's failings. Ryga possesses a sound and accurate understanding of the plight of rural, reservation-raised Natives such as Jaimie Paul and Rita Joe when they are thrust into the relentless mainstream of white urban life, but, ironically, he seems unable to liberate his writing from the hierarchical male value-system that his own drama sets out to expose as wrong and uncaring. Instead, feminist critics will find the play a sort of negative primer illustrating how marginalized a woman character might be within a drama written 20 years ago. And for a Native character, the marginalization is, by virtue of the very society in which she is imprisoned, doubled.

Even as Ryga attempts to excoriate white self-satisfaction and paternalistic intransigence -- as represented by the Magistrate -- as lethal to the Native culture and sensibility, the playwright himself becomes enmired in the very paternalism he sets out to critique. The didactic nature of his play, in fact, traps Rita Joe in a story which requires her passivity, which obscures her motivation. Why is Rita Joe in the city, where the cement makes her feet hurt, in the first place? What is she seeking? Why does she stay? Ryga never provides those answers. And while the dilemma Rita faces dramatizes the nightmarish entrapment of her life, it does not depict her as a complex human character.

Careful reading of Rita Joe's lines indicates that Ryga sees her primarily as a victim, as a person acted upon by events rather than as one who can act on her own behalf. Throughout her short life, men are her focus and men ultimately destroy her. Rita is rudderless: she seems to have no cunning to use against the white world, and she also seems childlike and basically passive. Even her anger sounds helpless:

> Once I had a job in a tire store . . . an' I'd worry about what time my boss would come . . . He was always late . . . and so was everybody. Sometimes I got to thinkin' what would happen if he'd not come. And nobody else would come. And I'd be all day in this big room with no lights on an' the telephone ringing an' people asking for other people that weren't there . . What would happen? (3)

While Rita's bewilderment may be an accurate representation of how lonely and at sea an untrained worker might feel in such a situation, Ryga never gives her an opportunity to learn any other sort of response. Her continued role as victim is essential to the dramatic spectacle of oppression he wishes to unfold. The idea of either female or Native empowerment is not included in such spectacle. In short, there is no place within Rita Joe for the ostensible subject of the drama to free herself from her role as object, no chance for her to win enlightenment about her situation, and therefore no opportunity for her to seize control of her life. A feminist critic must conclude, as the title would dictate, that Rita Joe inhabits the play only as an icon of sacrifice. She is, indeed as the title suggests, a martyr to her own innocence and powerlessness. While showing that this is the way life is for women like Rita Joe, Ryga offers no hint of how it might be different for someone else, such as Rita's younger sister Eileen, who faces death from tuberculosis.

Indeed, the play's main agent of change -- even if largely frustrated and impotent -- is represented by a male character, Jaimie Paul. Although largely powerless, full of bravado and restless energy, Jaimie admits he's "scared of dyin' . . . in the city" where he finds the people cold. Jamie clearly sees that the city lacks the social fabric he is accustomed to upon the reserve:

> A man don't count for much here . . . . Women can do as much as a man . . . There's no difference between men and women. I can't live like that. (91)

In attempting here to show how the white urban world has stripped Jaimie of his potency, Ryga implies that the abyss between men and women is natural, a good thing, even necessary to keep men strong. Jaimie's remark implies that without the difference, men lose control and are necessarily diminished. A feminist playwright might have Rita Joe observe that "women can do as much as a man" in the city, and proceed to give her Native character an active role in her own destiny, much as Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths give Jessica. Instead, Jaimie is threatened by the blurring of clear-cut divisions between the sexes; put another way, giving women similar chances, however limited they may be, "unmans" him. To this, Rita's only response is self-denying and maternal: she urges him to "stop worrying," or he'll get sick. So, frustrated, his sense of natural order disordered, unable to find a way to tame this alien world, Jaimie lashes out -- just as Allan does in The Crackwalker. Jaimie's confrontation with Mr. Homer, the symbol of white society's patronizing cut-rate charity, sparks increasingly passionate observation:

> I don't believe nobody. . . No priest nor government . . . They don't know what its like to . . . to want an' not have . . . to stand in line an' nobody sees you! . . . . I come to say no to you . . . That's all. . . That's all! (106)

Ironically, Jaimie could be describing the lives of millions of underprivileged women, both Native and white. In the ensuing scuffle at the drop-in centre, as Jaimie becomes increasingly frustrated in his attempt to get Mr. Homer "to learn" that he is a real person, Rita Joe tentatively supports Jaimie's actions, saying, "I think . . . Jaimie Paul's . . . right" (107). But she also attempts to stop Jaimie and the other young Indians from trashing Mr. Homer's operation. Inevitably, even as she struggles to put Mr. Homer's clothing table to rights, she again becomes the victim of white male vituperation with his insulting curse: "You slut . . . You breed whore!" Here, in fact, Ryga overtly recognizes and criticizes sexism, but the moment is not sustained.

When Rita Joe does finally act, to state her position against Jaimie Paul's haranguing of her father, David Joe, it is clear that she realizes the gap between her father's traditonal world and the one she has sought for herself in the city. And she appears to say goodbye to the former, although the latter holds nothing for her:

> For Chris' sakes, I'm not goin' back! . . . . Leave him alone . . He's everything we got left now! (115)

What, one wonders, about the Native mothers and grandmothers? Are they not also "left"? And although Rita later stands up to the pontificating Magistrate, defying his chronicling of native failures with a defiant cry of, "I'm not scared of you now, you bastard! . . . . You don't know nothin'!," she also is passively prophetic in the face of her impending death. She has dreamed about her own end -- "I seen it all happen once before . . . an' it was like this!" -- but she doesn't change her haunts to save herself. Even death does not save her, as one of the murderers rapes her corpse! Clearly, Ryga's play is designed to demand the tragic catharsis of a martyr's death, and the necessary sympathetic but passive victim is Rita Joe.

Ryga's presentation from the white, liberal point of view is more sympathetic to the male role than the female. Jaimie Paul, himself another victim, is much more of a fighter, much more "heroic" than Rita Joe. And even Rita's gentle, spiritually aware father David Joe, who appears in the play only briefly, is a more complex character than Rita. In fact, with David Joe, Ryga attempts to convey reservation life as less corrupt, more honorable than the urban jungle. Rita's father is imbued with a shamanistic wisdom; he speaks in heightened, poetic language. Inherent in his words is an implied natural wisdom which contrasts wonderfully with the pompous lectures of the Magistrate. But David Joe addresses many of these words of wisdom to Jaimie Paul:

> I seen a dragonfly breakin' its shell to get its wings. . . It floated on water and crawled up on a log where I was sitting. . . It dug its feet into the log an' then it pulled until

> the shell bust over its neck. Then it pulled
> some more . . . an' slowly its wings slipped
> out of the shell . . . . (121)

The message of the parable -- metamorphosis is possible, if painful -- is clear, but addressed to a male character. Although David Joe dearly loves his daughter, he sees her sentimentally, as a "little girl" still. Rather than listen to her story about her new life in the city, and perhaps give her some guidance, he wants her to feel guilty for leaving him:

> You left your father Rita Joe . . . . never
> wrote Eileen a letter that time . . . your
> father was pretty sick man that time . .
> pretty sick man. . . . (84)

A kind man, a gentle man, David Joe, too, is a patriarch, and The Ecstasy of Rita Joe is a profoundly patriarchal play.

ii

And if a white writer such as George Ryga, who was concerned with exposing "poverty, racism, class antagonism, and oppression" (Boire, 190) could not write his way far enough out of a male viewpoint to create a fully-rounded woman character, what happens when a young native playwright addresses women's dreams within a poverty-stricken setting on a reservation? One result is Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters[100]. Born in 1951, Highway grew up in a large Cree family (he is the 11th of 12 children) on the Brochet

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[100] Tomson Highway, The Rez Sisters (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988). The play won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best New Play in 1988 and was a nominee for the 1988 Governor General's Award for drama.

Indian Reserve in Northern Manitoba. Now a Toronto resident, Highway draws on his knowledge of reserve life for both The Rez Sisters and his 1989 companion-piece, Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing.[101] Although the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, home to both Cree and Ojibway, is an imaginary place, it is one Highway creates deliberately, as a self-sustaining and vibrant centre, a comic antidote to an external, alien white culture.

As Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths infused Jessica with the spirit of Coyote, so the energy of Nanabush pervades Highway's plays. In "A Note on Nanabush" in The Rez Sisters, clearly meant to make the play accessible to white audiences, Highway writes:

> The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings, and events. Foremost among these beings is the "Trickster," as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. "Weesageechak" in Cree, "Nanabush" in Ojibway, "Raven" in others, "Coyote" in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, he teaches us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit. Some say that "Nanabush" left this continent when the whiteman came. We believe he is still here among us -- albeit a little the worse for wear and tear -- having assumed other guises. Without him -- and without the spiritual health of this figure - the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (xii)

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[101] ----------. Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1989). This play won both a Dora Mavor Moore Award and the Wang International Author Prize at Toronto's International Literary Arts Festival in 1989.

However, in Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, Highway has inserted a new paragraph in the middle of his explanation:

> The most explicit distinguishing feature between the North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian (e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender . . . unlike English, French, German, etc., the male-female-neuter hierarchy is entirely absent. So that by this system of thought, the central hero figure from our mythology -- theology, if you will -- is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously. Therefore, where in The Rez Sisters, Nanabush was male, in this play -- flipside to The Rez Sisters -- Nanabush is female. (13, Dry Lips)

Playing Trickster himself, Highway is providing opposite-gender foils from within the spirit world for his two plays as part of the textual interplay between male and female views and expectations.

"The Rez" sisters include Pelajia Patchnose, 53; her sister Philomena Moosetail, 49; their cancer-stricken half-sister Marie-Adele Starblanket, 39; her sister (and thus Pelajia and Philomena's half-sister) Annie Cook, 36; Emily Dictionary, 32, Annie's sister; and the unlikable Veronique St. Pierre, sister-in-law of everyone, who has a mentally disabled adopted daughter named Zhaboonigan Peterson, 24. Highway's creation of outlandish family connections among his characters makes clear the clannishness and closely knit community on the "Wasy" Reserve. The major problem undercutting his comedy is that, due to the manic activity and the unidimensionality of his characters, none of them has the time to become more than a caricature. Veronique is the offensive busybody; Marie-Adele is the doomed one; Annie is a peppy country-music lovin' fool whose daughter Ellen "lives with this white guy in Sudbury." Emily is the angry butch-dyke; Philomena is vain and complacent. The most dynamic character in the play is Pelajia, who is at least allowed to meld her competent, practical, carpenter self with the nature of a dreamer who sits on her roof lamenting the loss of the old ways and the smallness of local bingo pots. Even enmeshed in her daily chores, Pelajia dares to dream of alternatives and say, "I wanna go to Toronto" (2). When the rumor that The Biggest Bingo In The World is coming to Toronto is confirmed, the entire sisterhood is infused with an urge to attend and change their luck. (This fervent belief in the intervention of Lady Luck is reminiscent of another Canadian play, in which another extended family of women gather to exchange confidences and lure fate, Michel Tremblay's Les Belles Soeurs-.[102]) Within the terms of their own interests and goals, the sisters' "grail" is a noble one: they all want to take their chances in Toronto and are determined to get themselves there somehow. This merry, take-charge attitude is a welcome change to the passivity of Rita Joe, and indicates that Highway has a much better sense of the energy a community of Native women can generate. The women are convinced that, once in Toronto, they will win a lot of money. Each imagines how she will help her family then: a new white toilet (Philomena), a new stove (Veronique), the biggest record player in the world (Annie) and an island where all her children will be safe (Marie-Adele). In order to raise the money -- $1,400 to finance their trip to Toronto in a borrowed van -- the women take matters into their own calloused hands. Undeterred when the chief at the band office refuses to finance their venture, the women launch a frenzied fund-raising blitz. They collect beer bottles, wash windows, hold a bake sale, hold a garage sale, take in laundry, babysit, pick blueberries, do repairs, amassing a "grand total of $1233.65" (74), to which Emily and Annie contribute $250 (after expenses) from their singing at the Anchor Hotel. Ultimately, their hard-driven co-operative effort nets the women $1,483.65 -- $83.65 over their objective.

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[102] Michel Tremblay, Les Belles Soeurs (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974). Tomson Highway claims to admire Michel Tremblay, yet the coupon-sticking, squabbling extended family in the Quebecois playwright's drama offers far more psychological insight into the traps and disappointments of women's lives than does The Rez Sisters.

The frenetic fundraising scene early in Act II is a mock-balletic tribute to the coping, make-do energy of women in communities everywhere who, once they get behind an idea, can always come up with necessary cash through dint of hard work and domestic skills. Highway here makes the point that even though the sisters' first impulse is to get a grant, a handout, from the male-dominated band council, they do not lapse into passivity when that alternative fails. They simply take matters into their own hands, literally, and get their backs into their task. On this level, The Rez Sisters can be interpreted as a hopeful play, an example of women putting aside their differences and rivalries to work for something they believe in.

Furthermore, on the trip to Toronto, as the gamblers change seats and confidences, we are allowed to gain a little more insight into each of the women's lives: Marie-Adele worries that her 14 kids will be split up after her death; Philomena sadly remembers the baby she gave up 28 years ago; Emily tells of the deadly collision between an 18-wheeler and the motorcycle of her lover Rosabella Baez in California. Although each of the women tells a heart-wrenching story from her past, each seems to have found the courage to continue living and coping. Once the women reach the bingo site, with its $500,000 jackpot "IF you play the game right" (101), it is clear by the surreal, dream-like nature of the game that they will not "win big." Their intentions to beat white society at its own game are doomed. Instead, in a final subversive disruption of the system, they surge forward to "grab the bingo machine with shouts of 'Throw this fucking machine into the lake! It's no damn good,' " (103) and close down the game.

In the course of the madness at the bingo, Marie-Adele "meets Nanabush" (104) and is escorted "into the spirit world." For her, meeting Nanabush is not a terrifying experience at all. The return to the acceptance of the status quo is reflected by Pelajia's speech over Marie-Adele's grave:

> What choice do we have? When some fool of a being goes and puts us Indians plunk down in the middle of this old earth, dishes out this lot we got right now. But. I figure we gotta make the most of it while we're here. You certainly did. And I sure as hell am giving it one good try. For you. For me. For all of us. (105)

For all her dreaming, Pelajia is back in Wasy; her consolation, however, is that she and the other women are going to do their best to "make the most" of their lot -- even if it's a lot they did not choose. Depending upon how one looks at it, the rambunctious Emily

Dictionary has been subdued into motherhood -- a pregnancy apparently achieved when the stud Big Joey tied her to the bed -- or she is exacting revenge on everyone by unleashing upon the world a child likely to have her strength and disposition in triplicate.

In the final analysis, it is questionable whether the The Rez Sisters can be considered a feminist play despite its focus upon a female world. Beneath its veneer of humour, some very disturbing attitudes lurk: overall, women are presented as foul-mouthed, petty, wrangling and envious "bitches," a name they apply to each other liberally. Perhaps the most unpalatable scene of the play is the protracted screaming match, which begins when Emily calls Veronique an "old bag," and continues, escalating in force, obscenity and decibels for ten pages until Marie-Adele succumbs to searing pain from her cancer. Highway exploits this altercation as a source of humour but the nature of the insults hurled ("slut," "whore, "fat-assed floozy," "maggot-mouthed vulture") reads more like a sickening indulgence of misogyny. (What happens when a bunch of the girls get together? Well, they just get bitchy, wax hysteric and before you know it, a full-scaled "cat fight" is raging.) All that stops the women from escalating their hostilities seems to be the shared vision of winning the giant bingo pot. The only person among the sisterhood who seems consistently tuned into the spiritual world is the horribly victimized Zhaboonigan, who was assaulted with a screwdriver by two white boys, a trauma so ghastly she has somehow transcended the material world, and is able to recognize the essence of Nanabush within the pesky gull who is "watching" Marie-Adele (19). So: the only women capable of connecting with the spiritual world are a terribly wounded, simple girl who plays the role of the "Fool" and a woman near death's door. And once the big adventure in the big city is over, the women return home, largely content to resume the old order.

Highway does offers a form of political assessment in Pelajia's angry response to Philomena's observation that she'll never be chief "because you're a woman":

> Bullshit! If that useless old chief of ours was a woman, we'd see a few things get done around here. We'd see our women working, we'd see our men working, we'd see our young people sober on Saturday nights, and we'd see Nanabush dancing up and down the hill on shiny black paved roads. (114)

The drama ends with Philomena's rapturous description of her renovated bathroom, which Pelajia dismisses contemptuously before resuming her reverie from the top of her roof, where we found her at the play's outset. This "return full circle" is reminiscent of the similar structure found in Jessica, which incorporates in a much more complex fashion the elements of dream, surreal pageantry and Native ceremony in a non-linear (dare we say female?) format.

Tomson Highway's sequel, Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, is a far more layered, complex and dynamic play in which the natural order of Wasaychigan Hills Indian Reserve is subverted in many wonderful comedic ways. According to Pierre St. Pierre, the most "revolutionary" event is that the women of the reserve -- at least, 27 of them -- have taken up hockey. Pierre explains their reasons for founding the Wasy Wailerettes:

> Them women from right here on this reserve, a whole batch of 'em, they upped and they said: "Bullshit! Ain't nobody on the face of this earth's gonna tell us women's got no business playin' hockey. That's bullshit!" . . . . So. They took matter into their own hands. (29)

In an inspired turn-about commentary on the machismo of male sports teams, the women change membership rules for the team: "you gotta be pregnant or have piles and piles of babies" to be a Wailerette. And the "natural" order of things is askew in other ways too: although Spooky Lacroix's wife is "gonna pop at any minute," it is the expectant father, not the mother, who is furiously knitting baby booties. And virile, beautiful 41-year-old Zachary Jeremiah Keechigeesik (whose name means 'heaven' or 'great sky' in Cree) is preoccupied by images of butter tarts and cherry pies and Black Forest Cakes as he schemes to set up a bakery on the reserve.

Ironically, despite the ructions they cause in the male world, few of the women actually appear in the play. The casting of Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing calls for only one female actor who plays four roles: Nanabush/the spirit of Gazelle Nataways, Patsy Pegahmagahbow, Black Lady Halked and Zacharay's wife Hera Keechigeesik. However, Highway does place on stage scenes of overt sexual violence against women. Even though the playful representative of the spirit world, Nanabush, is female, "she" is powerless to mediate the victimization of women which is a subtext of the male interaction in Highway's second play. For example, Patsy Pegahmagahbow is repeatedly called "Big Bum" Pegahmagahbow, and appears wearing an "oversized prosthetic bum" (97), just as Nanabush/Gazelle Nataways in the opening scene dons "a gigantic pair of false, rubberized breasts" (15). Does this stage business mimic the classic comedy of Aristophanes, for example, finding humor in the basic ungainliness of the human body? If so, then why does not Zacharay, who appears on stage nude in both the first and last scenes of the play, come adorned with an "oversized prosthetic penis"? Or is Highway simply exploiting female "tits and ass" for laughs? Is he doing a Native version of Lysistrata (which employs an epic phallus to show the effect of the women's sex-deprivation techniques upon the male characters) and enlarging female sexual organs to show how threatening or demanding the men find the activist women? Or is he showing woman as a bawdy, great-bellied goddess of the same ilk Jessica and Liz invoke in Jessica? Highway's depiction of women became a public issue in the spring of 1991 when Dry Lips was restaged to great acclaim -- and controversy -- at Toronto's Royal Alex Theatre. Reviewer Marian Botsford Fraser was among those who questioned the play's portrayal of women: she found the play to be a drama "studded with misogyny" despite its energy and power. She described her reaction in a newspaper article:

> . . . the two central events in the play are horrible abuses of women, unmitigated by compassion, the images outlined in neon while our attention is drawn not to the women who are suffering but to the men who are watching. This is a play about male relationships, the male psyche, for the most part traumatized rather than enriched by female influence.[103]

Even though Botsford Fraser finds the Royal Alex production to be a "powerful, big play, in which there is room for excess and eccentricity," she is also disturbed by the work. She writes that "contempt for women, both implicit and explicit, overshadows the richness and vitality of the play as a whole."

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[103] Marian Botsford Fraser, "Contempt for women overshadows powerful play," The Globe and Mail, April 17, 1991, p. A13.

The scenes Botsford dislikes are those depicting birth and rape, scenes in which women characters appear as grotesque objects of male scrutiny. First, Highway depicts the birth of Dickie Bird Halked, delivered by his drunken mother Black Lady Halked in a bar where she has been drinking for three weeks. According to Pierre, Big Joey, who is the unofficial father of the baby, was the bartender at the time, and did nothing to help:

> . . . when he saw the blood, he ran away and puked over on the other side of the bar, the sight of all that woman's blood just scared the shit right out of him. . . . (93)

Later on, Big Joey watches -- again without intervening -- as the mentally disturbed Dickie Bird rapes Patsy repeatedly with the crucifix he has taken from Spooky Lacroix's house. When an outraged Zachary asks him why he stood by and "let him do it?", Big Joey's reply is chilling:

> Because I hate them! I hate them fuckin' bitches. Because they - our own women - took the fuckin' power away from us faster than the FBI ever did. (120)

Although none of the other men (even the gentle Creature Nataways, who confesses he is in love with Big Joey) condones Big Joey's behavior, the only response comes from Spooky, who whispers, "They always had it." Is Spooky's rejoinder an affirmation of the grandmothers' power as represented by Vitaline in Jessica, or is it an admission of the basic impotence at the heart of machismo, as postured by men like Big Joey? (One thinks of similar words of misogyny on the lips of such powerless male characters as Judith Thompson's Toilaine and Allan.) Highway, as Trickster, offers both possibilities to the audience.

When Zachary awakens from his "nightmare" -- which the play has depicted -- he finds himself back in his own house with his wife and baby daughter. The play's final, highly idealized scene of family life can perhaps be read as Highway's alternative to the fractured, nightmare disorder that went before:

> And the last thing we see is this beautiful naked Indian man lifting this naked baby Indian girl up in the air, his wife sitting beside them watching and laughing. (130)

"The wife" is no longer out playing hockey and is back home where she belongs. And she has produced a baby, as is expected. But does this image of the perfect family cancel out the previous ugliness? The "baby's laughing voice," the last sound of the play, would suggest so, would imply that reality is this idealized familial scene. Unfortunately, a feminist critic is likely to find the blood of Caroline Halked's drunken delivery and of Patsy Pegahmagahbow's brutal rape far more haunting.

ii

When the rewritten Jessica was produced in Toronto in February, 1986, Jessica's role was played by an actress named Monique Mojica; later that year, in November, when Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters was first produced at the Native Canadian Centre in

Toronto, Mojica played the ailing Marie-Adele Starblanket. But Mojica was not content to pursue only an acting career. She was mulling over the idea of a native "herstory," a concept which eventually took the form of the spirited drama Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots.[104] Mojica's focus is not upon one character who represents EveryNativeWoman; rather she demonstrates the multiplicity and complexity of the long, bloody process of colonization of indigenous peoples by juxtaposing current stereotypes with illustrations of the history of both North and South American natives following European contact.

Originally workshopped in May, 1989, by Nightwood Theatre in co-production with Native Earth Performing Arts, Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots was then read at the Weesageechak Festival of New Work by Native Playwrights at Theatre Passe Muraille a month later. Then came its workshop production at the Groundswell Festival of New Work by Women, culminating in its first full production in February 9 through March 4 at Passe Muraille's BackStage.

Mojica energetically employs characterization, oration, song, dance and symbol in Princess Pocahontas to take an ironic, frequently satirical, and determinedly polemical look at the tragic fate of North and South American native women through the ages, from European contact forward. Mojica uses an adaptation of the music hall or vaudeville format to string loosely together a series of scenes and musical numbers which make political points lightly but deftly. The play's intention to present serious information with sporadic interjections of humour becomes immediately evident in its opening scene. There, the sardonically named Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides launches her determined pursuit of the "498th annual North American Indian Beauty Contest" (67). Mojica's choice of the beauty pageant, the ultimate objectification of the female body, with rewards for all the most blatantly traditional feminine attributes (charm and congeniality; docile demeanor; harmlessly decorative talents), is a brilliant choice of metaphor delineating the doubly marginalized -- as woman and as non-white -- status of Native women within modern Canadian and American societies. The point of Native women's colonization is hammered home further by the name of the (male, of course) host/colonizer of the contest/native population: George Pepe Flaco Columbus Cartier da Gama Smith ("But you can call me Bob."), who is bringing us the competition of pulchritude "direct from the Indian Princess Hall of Fame."

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[104] Monique Mojica, "Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots," Canadian Theatre Review, #64, Fall 1990, pp. 67-77.

Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides functions as an unwitting commentator upon her own subjugation as she disperses commercial "Cornnuts" from a plastic bag and parades on stage with a musical mish-mash of strains from Hollywood tom-toms, the Indian Love Call, the good, the bad and the ugly, "and the Mazola commercial." The ambitious princess cheerfully exploits herself for the sake of the contest, announcing her "talent" offering:

> I shall dance for you in savage splendour the dance of the sacrificial corn maiden, and

> proceed to hurl myself over the precipice all for the loss of my one true love, Captain JOHN WHITEMAN. (67)

At this point, it is plain that while Mojica is chronicling the discounting of Native culture by whites, she is also making a point about self-responsibility and complicity: that natives who passively or gullibly ascribe to whites' dismissive, stereotypical views are at least partial authors of their own downfall, are complicit in their own exploitation and subjugation. (We see similar points about women's complicity being made in _This is for you, Anna_ and _Under the Skin_, for example.) As Princess Buttered hovers on the brink of the Romantic abyss wherein she would lose her selfhood, the message is clear: sentimentality is an empty luxury the savvy woman (Native or otherwise) should no longer indulge in. Nevertheless, Buttered-on-Both-Sides has not yet reached that state of consciousness: she jumps over the Niagara Falls precipice screaming, "Geronimoooooooooo!"

The play thus very clearly signals its political subtext: Mojica's drama assumes a firm position on the events it enacts, a position, furthermore, that makes what was once marginal -- that is, the Native world as previously presented by white historians -- the centre of the action. Put another way, the events of European contact with the Americas are presented from the "other side," telling the stories of those whom white history books regard as the "losers," depicting the European-originated myths of Columbus and Cortez from the Native perspective. Since the playwright chooses female subjects for each of her segments, she adds an additional perspective: a feminist filtering of Native history told from an activist viewpoint. The irony is enhanced by the tension set up by the "colonial history" most members of the audience will have been inculcated with since early childhood; thus, Mojica deliberately sets her action against a further, dramatic-ironic subtext -- the phantom of accepted, "official" history lurking just beyond the footlights.

The two-character play can be seen to reflect the idea of the continuity of Natives' history (independent of the white man's national borders dividing territories in the Americas) by the role-doubling whereby two WOMEN play all the roles, white and native, male and female, within the compressed, non-linear historical narrative dramatized. The transformative intention of the play is mirrored by the "transformations" within the script through different time periods, geographies, and tribes, culminating in the final empowering conclusion that:

> Una nacon no sera conquistada hasta que los corazones de sus mujeres caigan a la tierra/ A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. (77)

The Cheyenne saying is borne out by the spirit and manner of the play's use of ritual within recollection to assert that, "The women are the medicine, so we must heal the woman." That awareness, in keeping with the belief that the "blue spot at the base of the spine -- the sign of Indian blood" (68) will endure despite the depradations of white culture, the loss of self through obliteration of the native past, the disease, deaths, and the white man's degrading taunts ("Puta! Chingada. Cabrona! India de meirda.") endured by the play's female characters. (68).

The characters Mojica creates and places on stage do not represent the faceless native female. Instead, they are many, reflecting the diversity and complexity of native cultures. In all, we see six authentic native women whose stories cast into further ridiculous relief Princess Buttered's empty posturing of a white-created myth and her aping of white standards of culture and beauty in an attempt to "have it all" (75). The would-be beauty queen's quest becomes all the more picayune when considered next to the image of the Puna woman/deity invested with power as warrior/ /creator/destroyer/mother of all, who is "married to none but the sun himself/or maybe the Lord of the Underworld." When these women, who also have the Spiderwoman's tale-spinning powers, are "betrayed" by "their own fathers brothers uncles husbands," they "herd together "in the high land away from their men, and are turned against their will into "sexless/without fire/without pleasure/without power/Encased in plaster/painted white" (72). All that is left of this lost power is the hope that even one child will sense the mystical strength of this past.

Even when Mojica's characters' are successful, there is a price to be paid. For example, being competent -- "the best moccasin maker" -- is Marie's downfall: she is sent by her father to help the French explorers by cooking their meals, making their canoes, showing them what berries to pick, and of course, to give birth to the Métis. Regarded as commodities, women such as Margaret, in tough times, are taken to the fort and traded for "flour, sugar and brandy" (74), then their protective bear grease is washed off their skin and they are dolled up in "floral-sprigged dresses" to please the "company men." Even women like Madelaine, who has been "Mrs. Johnston" for fifteen years has no security: when her husband decides it's time for her to be "turned off," her fate is to be passed on to another man, Mr. Campbell, "who has been very kind" in accepting the offer of a second-hand wife.

It is interesting to note that Mojica chooses to bookend these scenes of cruelly exploited native women with two glimpses of women who try to "make it" or pass as whites: "Matoaka, Indian Princess Pocahontas, Lady Rebecca," who saved the life of Captain John Smith, left her family, and "became a Christian Englishwoman," an exalted state which, alas, did not protect her from the deadly effects of the English climate; and with the modern-day "Pocahontas," Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides, who does not resist the role of "Cigar Store Squaw," and yet who justifies that degradation by her ambition:

> I want it all! I want to be free to express myself. I want to be the girl next door! I wanna have lots and lots of blonde hair -- great big blonde hair. (75)

Ironically, and of course, aside from its intrinsic shallowness, Princess Buttered's dream is doomed: the very colour of her skin prohibits her from ever becoming the girl next door. And the "blondes" she would emulate are known and valued only for their bodies, and thus their only value, their ability to entice men.

Mojica pulls no punches at this point: as Miss Congeniality, the Princess's victory in the cheap contest is as tacky as her illuminated ears-of-corn headdress and as flaccid as her similies proclaiming that her heart "soar(s) like a rabbit." However, the play transcends this observation: the next "transformation" takes the audience into the blood-and-guts issues of South American Native women such as Annie Mae -- "beaten, raped, shot in the back of the head" -- and the nameless 13-year-old Chilean girl who was "interrogated" by inserting a live rat into her vagina, a rat which was driven into a frenzy with electric shocks (76).

The play's final song is proof that the Indian woman's power lives on, even though "barefoot and possessionless I/walk resigned but not broken." The end scene's return to a "mundane urban environment,'' makes clear that white feminists' philosophies may have no relevance for Native women:

> So, it's International Women's Day, and here I am. Now, I'd like you to take a good look -- I don't want to be mistaken for a crowd of Native women. I am one. And I do not represent all Native women. I am one.

But dramatist Monique Mojica has achieved solidarity with her "friends, sisters, guerrilleras, women word warriors" (77), at the end of the journey of transformations enacted by the play itself.

Mojica's play offers a humorous, lively re-visioning of North American history from a Native woman's perspective. The play calls into question a variety of stereotypes and assumptions, and promulgates the importance of Native women's solidarity while doing so. A more powerful play which brings the re-visioning of history even closer to home is Jessica, the powerful collaborative effort by Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell. Nowhere is the struggle between dramatic representation and cultural appropriation more honestly or relentlessly explored than in The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation.[105] The book contains not only the playscript which resulted after six years of emotionally charged interaction between the Toronto improvisational actress/writer and the prairie Métis activist but a taxing -- just over 100 pages -- dialogue between Griffiths and Campbell as they wrestled with such potent forces as anger, racial difference and guilt during their sporadic and demanding collaboration.

At the heart of the two women's difficulties lay the issue of "story," whose story it was, who would do the telling and from what point of view. Although even in their edited format still sometimes too opaque, the transcripts probe the painful issues of colonization and appropration on a raw personal level. The play Jessica takes as its point of departure Campbell's angry memoir, Halfbreed,[106] but goes far beyond it in exploring native spirituality, as well as feminism and women's untapped power to transform themselves and thus begin reordering the society in which they live. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of reading The Book

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[105] Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1989).

[106] Maria Campbell, Halfbreed (Toronto: Seal Books, 1979). The memoir was first published in 1973 by McClelland & Stewart.

of Jessica is comprehending the tortuous route both Campbell and Griffiths had to travel. Their "process" began in 1974 when Campbell became interested in theatre, took root in 1980 when Griffiths and Campbell met for the first time, and ended in 1989 with the publication of the resultant playscript. The earliest production of *Jessica* took place in Saskatoon in November, 1982, and ended in a disagreement when Campbell took umbrage at Director Paul Thompson's presentation of a contract in which Griffiths would have first refusal rights on the role of Jessica in the next production of the play and in which 25th Street House Theatre would own the film, video and television rights on the script. For Campbell, this was a betrayal by her white collaborators which echoed the earlier betrayal of Métis people by whites who took their land and displaced them from their way of life. As she tells Griffiths in the section of their transcript called "The Contract," the historical echoes were too much for her to bear:

> I understood about sharing with you and Paul, but nobody had ever said anything about the Theatre owning anything. And that really made me angry because two film producers had flown in for opening night and negotiations were already beginning for a film, and the negotiations were for *Halfbreed* and also the stuff in *Jessica* . . . . The ugliest part of the contract was that I had never been consulted, and it reminded me of the treaties, being asked to put my 'X' on something, and I didn't even get the right of an interpreter. My great-great grandfather was head chief and

> signed Treaty Six. But he was there to negotiate, and he had an interpreter, and this was nineteen eighty-whatever, and I wasn't given any respect at all. (105-106)

At the time, Griffiths tells her, "I didn't understand what any of it meant . . . that's true. I left all that kind of stuff up to 'male energy.' Well, maybe if I'd given it importance, the big break between us wouldn't have happened." (104-105) In that remark, Griffiths speaks to one of the concerns of Jessica: women's loss of their earlier spiritual power, their own complicity in consigning it to men because they were not aware of their own worth.

The "break" resulted in a silence of three years, during which time, Griffiths, still "haunted" by the project, rewrote and restructured Jessica. Clarke Rogers at Theatre Passe Muraille, decided to produce the new version. Needless to say, when Campbell received a copy of the new script in June, 1985, she became angry all over again, but she agreed to meet with Griffiths at Gabriel's Crossing, Gabriel Dumont's homestead. As a result, the two women agreed to continue the new play together. Griffiths rewrote it yet again, and its April-May production in 1986 won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play. It was also a runner-up (with Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters) for the Chalmers Award and was named Best Canadian Production at the Quinzaine International Festival in Quebec City. Although the two women eventually were able to patch up their relationship, they both admit negative feelings still linger:

> LINDA: . . .the truth is, I am wrecked over doing this, I'm still afraid of you, still feel like your servant. I'm still hurt and angry about so many things. . . .
> MARIA: . . .it's just a wound we want to be healed sooner than is possible. Maybe it'll take a hundred years. Angry or not, I feel good, and that's a lot better than feeling angry and bad. (112)

One of the admissions Griffiths must make in the compilation of The Book of Jessica is that, "I'm a thief. I'm a fucking thief. I don't care, I have always been a thief" (82). Campbell demands this admission from her because:

> Today, most art is ugly, because it's not responsible to the people it steals from. Real, honest-to-God true art steals from the people. It's a thief. It comes in. It's non-obstructive. You don't feel it. It comes in, and you don't even notice that it's there, and it walks off with all your stuff, but then it gives it back to you and heals you, empowers you, and it's beautiful. Seventy-five per cent of the art that's out there steals, but it doesn't give anything back. It doesn't bring you joy. It doesn't heal you. It doesn't make you ask questions. It doesn't do anything. (p.83)

In fact, in this statement, Campbell is describing what the best of feminist drama can do: it can draw on the facts of women's lives, represent them dramatically, and in that representation offer opportunities for the self-knowledge which is the basis of eventual social change.

Jessica functions as a drama on several levels, beginning with the female protagonist's struggle to find her identity as a Métis woman, as a hybrid in a culture that harbours contempt for both natives and women. Parallel with Jessica's fight to determine her own self-respect is her struggle to put herself in touch with the spiritual side of her background, to heal her wounded spirit and to find an inner balance which includes embracing the "Wolverine" within (much as Judith Thompson's play _I Am Yours_ explores the need to accept the "animal" within). Integral to her spiritual quest is the necessity of grappling with the self-loathing directed at her own sexuality and the impulse to self-destruction which she must defeat if she is to attain full healing. The play's distinctive non-linear, episodic development, buttressed constantly by the doubling of roles as actors are "transformed" from corporeal to spirit world and back again, is integral to the mystical nature of Jessica's pursuit of her inner balance, of her efforts to heal a self wounded by her mother's death, a childhood rape, and her forays into prostitution and heroin abuse. But where life on the streets destroys Rita Joe, it propels Jessica to turn inward, to explore her past and find a personal truth. When she tells her co-prostitute Liz that, "I don't think I can keep it up any longer," (140), she begins to recognize the destructiveness of the schism between her inner and outer worlds.

The difference between Jessica at this suicidal hiatus in her life and Rita Joe when she has the dream presaging her own murder is that Jessica is connected by Vitaline/Coyote -- who recognizes that "she is caught somewhere, between the light and darkness of her own spirit" (123) -- to the spirit world of Bear, Crow, Wolverine and Unicorn. Vitaline is a marvellous character: wise, sardonic, tough, and adamantly female. She has no doubts about her "mission" with Jessica's recalcitrant spirituality:

> Stop all that crazy talk before the spirits give you a good whack. I'm your teacher, I'm very smart, I've taught all kinds of people, one white guy even. I helped you find your power and you're saying I'm just some old woman raving away in the bush? (120)

Not only is Jessica a woman struggling to delineate herself, she is aided by a powerful mentor in touch with the wisdom of the grandmothers and grandfathers of the disintegrating native past. Throughout the play, Vitaline reiterates that Jessica "had to go to (her) dark side," and she brooks no easy way out. Through Vitaline, who can call Grandmother Coyote, Jessica is able to plunge into the miasma of her unconscious and relive her past in order to be purified and strong enough to forge a new future.

The play's inclusion of the non-native entity of the Unicorn integrates the mixture of Native and European cultures within

Jessica's heritage, and shows the power of the two ancient sources of wisdom. More important to a feminist reading of the play, the Unicorn puts Jessica in contact with the era before patriarchy held sway over religion and culture, the time when the "round-bellied . . . goddess, who is the Mother, who is the beginning" (132) still had power. It is significant that although the native spirits first resist Vitaline's modern medicine circle which calls the Unicorn among them, Bear (the regenerative energy) recalls that, "this one-horned beast, she's a relative, part of us that was left behind long ago" (123). Furthermore, the inclusion in the play of the Coyote and the Unicorn can be seen to mirror the collaboration of the two authors, each with a different, contrasting heritage.

Integral to the transformative aspect of the play is Jessica's connection through the Unicorn to female sexuality and spiritual power. Liz transforms into the Unicorn to "convince the Native Spirits to draw power from another time, another kind of source":

> Just give in a little, give her a chance. You have to feel the Lady. Like silk between your thighs. (131)

When a skeptical Crow asks, "What's so holy about being a hooker?'' Unicorn replies, "They could heal with their mouths, hands, tongues. . . . " Coyote begins to remember, and Bear knows, "The idea is to take away shame." Most surprising of all, even Wolverine admits the past with, "Let her pray to Ishtar and have done with it."

In an attempt to show the power of the female goddesses -- a scene far more compelling in an actual production than in reading the script -- Crow doubling as a mystical Client attempts to orchestrate the calling up of the old ways, in a scene reminiscent of Sharon Stearns's Hooking for Paradise (when Florence attempts to invest the crass physicality of Rose's bawdy house with a more spiritual dimension). Crow induces Liz and Jessica to call up the "Goddess chant" from "deep down, right from that female plumbing":

> Innanna, Morrigana . . . Mari . . . Ishtar . . . Astarte . . . Altar . . . . (134)

Despite their resistance, the two women begin to explore the idea of female sexuality in a seductive scene which climaxes with Liz, who remembers the Unicorn "in the back of her mind," describing the goddess:

> She's the earth and the moon and the grandmother. She's the goddess that farts and eats, who gets mad, then loves, who knows all the rhythms and all the changes, who changes and changes. . . Who is freeeeee . . . . (136)

At this moment, Jessica and Liz almost abandon themselves to the goddess's power, "in a kind of ecstasy," but then Jessica "cuts out, yanking off her blindfold" to return to the "reality" at hand. At this point, Liz knows of Jessica's need to connect with this past and tells her friend she stopped singing because, "It's your fucking song. . . . ", to which the still-resistant Jessica retorts, "You didn't grow up with it like I did" (136).

Jessica, with its emphasis upon the power of female spirituality and the necessity of connecting with woman's primal sexuality, has elements of radical-feminist thought underpinning its drama. But it also argues for integration between male and female worlds. Just as Jessica must connect with the lost Great Goddess, so is there Crow's wisdom that, "It's time for the Bear," that is, regenerative sexuality as personified by Sam. However, unlike Rita Joe, who seems to consign her life over to Jaimie Paul, Jessica absorbs what Sam has to offer, but she also goes on, both with her quest to learn the white legal ways Bob/Wolverine can teach her, and to continue her quest with Vitaline against Sam's objections. And Jessica resists intimacy with Sam beyond a certain point:

> It's like there's a place I've got inside that men always seem to want. Sometimes they don't even want me, they just want to find out what's in that place, and I won't let them, I won't let you, I won't let anybody. It's my secret until I find out what it is . . . . (159)

When a resentful Sam asks what Jessica is protecting, she answers, "My power." Here, it is clear Jessica is exploring another layer of colonization, that men have achieved over women. Griffiths and Campbell's drama argues that women must resist, must not continue to give their power over to men.

The sickness at the core of the existing imbalance between men and women is made horribly clear in the scene of violence between Sam and Jessica, particularly in Sam's explanation for why he has beaten Jessica:

> I want to beat you because I can't beat them, you're just one step down from me, that's all. You're the one thing around that's lower than me. You've gotta support me, you've gotta believe in me, even when I'm an asshole . . . Somewhere in this world I've got to be right. They did take our balls away, and they hold them dangling in front of us while we rage around and try to get them back. All we've got is rage . . . . You've got your mysteries, all I've got is that sometime I was a warrior . . . . (161)

Despite the self-pity and the male supremist assumptions inherent in Sam's "stand-by-your-man" expectations, this speech is also an astute dissection of the crippling burdens of assumed machismo and the impotent rage of the disenfranchised. It is a speech which, in different forms, is made by Alan, Joe and Toilaine in Judith Thompson's plays. Nevertheless, because he fears (and, one suspects, envies) Jessica's "magic," Sam cannot allow himself to believe in it, and sees it as a divisive force between them.

However, as the play's final scene in Vitaline's kitchen -- one of the most powerful in contemporary Canadian theatre -- shows, male power cannot be predicated upon female submission. Despite Sam's threats, Vitaline is not fooled. "You want a woman to love you, or a slave?" she scathingly asks Sam (167). She gives her version of the source of violence and oppression:

> Thousands of years ago, there was a balance between the Sun and the Moon, then a crack opened up, a crack like the middle of an old lady's ass. And from that crack came the Beast. (169)

Vitaline knows that male (the Sun) taking and female (the Moon) giving has not been a good bargain, not for humans, nor for the earth itself:

> He took, and she gave until there was nothing left but migraine headaches and sacrifice. The Sun shone all day and all night. The Moon hid behind clouds, betraying her own light. The balance was broken. The whole earth has to do with that balance, the tides and the winds and the growth of everything. Nothing can be right again without it, nothing. (170)

Although Jessica is torn and terrified to confront her innermost self for fear she will end up alone, she does accept the kiss of the Wolverine in her final struggle towards balance. She is urged on by Vitaline, who says, "You're strong enough to take that Wolverine, he's the last one Jesse, the last one" (171). And in Jessica's final transformation, she is able to prevent her own raging Wolverine from killing Bob, the representative of legalistic white society, because she recognizes that his death would not take her to a "fertile place."

As Bob transforms back to Wolverine, "the ceremony returns full circle" (174), and Jessica is able to tell Vitaline that Wolverine is "inside," that she acknowledges but no longer requires the interventions of Crow, Coyote, Bear or Unicorn, that there is a name for the "someone made of smoke," and it is "Jessica." Only then, finally, having healed her spirit, integrated her warring opposites, united yin and yang, is Jessica able to burst forth triumphantly into her own song. She has achieved her own transformation, and the moment is one of the most powerful, eerily moving and compelling triumphs in Canadian theatre.

It is heartening to survey these five plays and notice their definite growth in power and complexity over the past 20 years. And it is even more encouraging to note that the best of them are being written by Natives, from an Native point of view. Of the works studied in this chapter, the most compelling on both dramatic and feminist grounds is Jessica. The play is complex, multi-levelled, and theatrically satisfying. Furthermore, it addresses both national and sexual politics by attempting to posit an argument for -- and means to -- co-existence and integration between Native and white, female and male, cultures. Best of all, in feminist terms, the play's protagonist takes responsibility -- with the assistance of her grandmother-spirit-mentor Vitaline -- for her own quest for autonomy and self-understanding. And in so doing, Jessica ceases to be marginalized as either a Native or a Woman: she takes her place centre stage, encircled by her spirit ancestors. Because she has managed to delve within herself and sort out her feelings about the conflicts in her past, incorporating experiences both good and bad, she finally is able to give public voice to her inner being.

CHAPTER VI

> I made some studies, and reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it. I can take it in small doses, but as a lifestyle I found it too confining.
> -- "Trudy," in Jane Wagner's The Search For Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe[107]

i

Just as a playwright cannot write a feminist play without an awareness of social history and women's issues, so a theatre company seldom produces a play within a vacuum. Most theatre companies undertake their new season based upon expectations about their intended audience -- the consumers at whom they are aiming their dramatic product, if you will. It is interesting to note that all of the plays discussed in this chapter, a chapter which explores four "prototypic" feminist plays, spring out of explicitly feminist theatre communities where a sympathetic feminist audience was assured. Perhaps that accounts for the brio, assurance and dramatic prowess of Smoke Damage, This is for you, Anna, and Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), all of which were created by companies and writers at ease in the feminist mode and confident of their reception among a like-minded sorority.

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[107] Jane Wagner, The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 18.

In this chapter's plays can be found the defining traits of quintessential feminist drama: woman-centred politics are overt and explicit; characters follow their impetus to merge public and private concerns; there is an emphasis upon interiority; linearity is absent; dramatic conventions are challenged; and, perhaps most important of all, the transformative impetus inherent in each play is a vital component of its dramatic development. On the one hand, one can see all previous women-centred English-Canadian drama as working slowly towards such plays; or, on the other hand, one can view the four plays discussed in this chapter as the "centre," the ideal, from which all discussions of feminist drama flow. It has been my intention in this analysis to give a historiocal progression, and overview, showing how women playwrights developed within the traditional theatre world despite obstacles, how feminist drama took root in the less-hierarchic milieu of alternative theatre and how collective creation led inevitably to feminist productions because of its challenge to conventional theatre, its greater flexibility of form, its emphasis upon political analysis and its tendency towards multiplicity of voice and story.

For many contemporary feminist playwrights, traditional dramatic reality, as reflected by linear, playwright-created, director-centred models of theatre, is too confining -- too limiting of the imagination and perhaps even too coercive of the spirit. Often, clear articulation of feminist principles requires an open-ended, protean stage model to allow both the interplay of characters and the re-presentation of history. As Chapter I indicated, the development of "alternate theatre," starting as early as 1959 with George Luscombe's Toronto Workshop Productions, resulted partly from the recognition that traditional playwright-centred drama does not always offer such freedom towards variability. Similarly, over the past decade feminist plays have come into being through co-operative or collective creation fuelled by a shared political mindset which guides both the play's content and production techniques. In many such cases, the co-writers may begin with several different points of view about the topic or problem of the play, but as they work together an integrated vision emerges which reflects an assimilation of a new interpretation. This chapter examines four highly entertaining plays which have been developed through collective creation in feminist companies. All four -- Smoke Damage, This is for you, Anna, Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), and Aphra -- begin with a particular historical point or accumulation of facts and re-present such "reality" through a feminist telescope. In so doing, these dramas "play" with accepted wisdom, theatrical expectations, and assumptions about women's "proper" role and behavior. Furthermore, all four plays move beyond the national focus of such representations of history as depicted in What Glorious Times They Had or The Fighting Days to embrace events and characters beyond national boundaries. This broadening of scope refutes the long-standing and increasingly unjust complaint that Canadian dramas are too regional or parochial in content to garner international audiences. In addition, these plays further prove that a feminist consciousness need not produce an élitist or narrowly focused drama, and that, in fact, a production influenced by feminist-collective techniques can be powerfully inclusive even as it challenges accepted traditions.

Theatre critic Alan Filewod sets out three "aspects" of collective creation -- process, politics and poetics -- as a basis for analysis of collective creation.[108] He goes on to explain that there are "three primary considerations" which can be usefully applied to understand collective creation's uniqueness:

> the relation of the collective process to final text; the relation of the process to the subject, whether it be a community, an historic event, or a work of fiction; and the relation of the final text to the subject. (46)

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[108] Alan Filewod, "collective Creation: Process, Politics and Poetics," Canadian Theatre Review 34 (Spring 1982), 46.

Although Filewod concedes that all of theatre is a collective creation which draws from within the confines of its own genre as well as from all aspects of the culture it represents, he points out that when a play is not the product of just one playwright's imagination, the responsibility for the play rests with a collective, not upon the shoulders of an individual (47). Filewod sees that the crucial difference between works created by individual and collective playwrights is that "the individual synthesizes the objective world into a private vision, whereas the collective synthesizes it into a public vision" (47). Collective creation stems from some kind of "shared analysis," he argues, "because it synthesizes the artistic responses of a number of individuals." While improvisation does not always connote that a play has been created collectively, Filewod notes, "it is by recognizing improvisation that we often recognize collective creation" (48). Unlike the Latin American tradition of collective creation, in Canada there is a greater individualist tradition. In fact, Filewod notes:

> Generally, the Canadian tradition has been the one-shot collective; very rarely has it happened that the same group of people work on more than one or two shows, although naturally, some theatres -- most notably Passe Muraille -- have used a basic corps on a series of projects. (48)

Many of the theatre companies which began in the early 1970s as collective-creation houses might be regarded as providing the beginnings of feminist theatre. Many collective productions incorporate principles which such feminist critics as Sue-Ellen Case, Michelene Wandor and Helene Keyssar now view as characteristic of feminist drama: a genesis in specific political consciousness; a non-linear or episodic plot development; a de-emphasis of formal characterization in favor of a more transformative depiction of character; a willingness to recast or re-examine conventional history and accepted fact; and an emphasis upon "interior" or personal development, which often makes for the most powerful drama when it is paired with a character's understanding of "exterior" events as well. And, judging by the number of actors in collective-creation productions who eventually turn to playwrighting (Diane Grant, Linda Griffiths, Monica Mojica and Ann-Marie MacDonald, to name just four), the freedom of the process empowers participants to take on new modes of self-expression and communication.

ii

Since feminism emphasizes female solidarity and encourages shared, community-based solutions to societal problems, it would seem that collective creation is one useful method feminist playwrights might deploy to challenge and change the dominant "politics" of Canadian theatre. As well, collectively created productions can offer alternatives of both methodology and politics for both theatre workers and their audiences. Indeed, one of Canada's most successful and provocative collective theatre troupes is Toronto's 13-year-old Nightwood Theatre, the source of a number of witty, vital feminist productions, including three to be discussed in this chapter, the historically revisionist Smoke Damage; the powerful This is for you, Anna and the successful Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet). And new feminist theatres are still coming into being, the latest of which is Calgary's Maenad Productions (founded in 1987 to promote "the feminine vision through exciting and dynamic new works"), which in the winter of 1991 staged the unexpectedly popular production Aphra, also a subject in this chapter, based on the life of 17th century playwright Aphra Behn, whom critic George Woodcock has termed "the English Sappho."[109]

Ironically, when the Nightwood company was founded in 1978, its members were concerned that people not consider it a "women's theatre" because the collective did not wish to be ghettoized or set apart as doing "just" women's issues. Its founders -- Cynthia

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[109] George Woodcock, The English Sappho (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), p. xii.Woodcock writes that "Aphra Behn was much more like a twentieth century woman than George Etherage or William Wycherley was like a twentieth century man."

Grant, Kim Renders, Mary Vingoe and Maureen White -- came together at a time when each was seeking something different from the fare of standard Toronto companies. The women regarded themselves as "innovative young artists . . . capable of developing an innovative aesthetic."[110] Cynthia Grant recalls that in Toronto in the late 1970s, "the older generation of theatres" included such former "alternate" theatres as "Tarragon, Toronto Free, Factory Theatre Lab, Toronto Workshop Productions and Theatre Passe Muraille," all of which gobbled up what Ontario government funding remained after such "national" institutions as Stratford, Shaw and the regional theatres received grants (46).

One of the most imaginative young feminist writers to emerge from a background in collective theatre is Banuta Rubess, a Toronto-born playwright of Latvian extraction who earned a doctorate in history from Oxford University while a Rhodes Scholar. In 1982, when Rubess returned to Canada following an intensive involvement with two experimental English theatre companies (A Company and The 1982 Theatre Company), she became involved with Nightwood Theatre.[111] The young writer/actress recalls that, Nightwood "offered me support, encouragement, freedom. They sought me out" (58). In her early work, Rubess "identified" with performances which "were very visual as opposed to verbal" (56), but she does not think form is more important than politics:

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[110] The Nightwood Theatre Collective, "Notes from the Front Line," in Canadian Theatre Review 43, (Summer, 1985), p. 46.

[111] Banuta Rubess in Fair Play, p. 58.

> I have always been interested in "revisioning" history, in showing history from a new perspective in order to uncover truth, and form is the means. I should add that I also feel the product should be entertaining. I was strongly impressed by Brecht's insistence that we must have fun (spass) in the theatre. After all, if I can't present the politics in a theatrically exciting manner, I might as well run for office or participate in a political campaign. (56)

As such plays as What Glorious Times They Had, The Fighting Days and Maggie & Pierre have proven, humour is essential when topics of sexual politics are tackled if a feminist production is not to run the risk of alienating at least one half of its audience. And, as critic Regina Barreca argues in They Used to Call Me Snow White . . . But I Drifted, humour is a subversive sexual-political weapon when used by women, and its effective deployment is one means of rejecting the quiescent roles traditionally assigned to women.[112]

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[112] Regina Barreca, They Used to Call Me Snow White . . . But I Drifted (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991). Barreca maintains that men tell jokes containing sexual innuendo to remind women of their objectification and to keep them in their place. But when women tell jokes of their own, she says, they are refusing to play the role of passive victim. Furthermore, witty women prove they possess the intelligence to understand the power plays inherent in telling funny or risque stories. Barreca also says that women who tell jokes -- and laugh at them -- have rejected the role of the "Good Girl . . . who doesn't get it" (p. 3). Female comics and humorists,

Rubess says her association with Nightwood Theatre was "natural" because, "they were very interested in women's work, they were interested in collective work, and as a women's company, they could accept that I would want carte blanche . . . . " (59). Nightwood, Rubess suggests, would not try to dictate to her as a more traditional company might. Among the first feminist plays Rubess worked on at Nightwood was This is for you, Anna, which began as a twenty-minute show for the Women's Perspective festival in 1983. Rubess recalls that her interest in female revenge plays drew her into what became known as "The Anna Project":

> At the time I was very interested in the taboos of feminist art, particularly the violence in women. I had had long discussions with . . . Suzanne Khuri, who was very much taken with [Latvian writer] Aspazija's early plays, which are full of revenge. We had talked about putting these plays about female avengers together and creating a Grand Guignol piece with a guillotine at the front door and so on. Then I saw a newspaper clipping about Marianne Bachmeier, a West German woman who shot the man who killed her seven-year-old daughter. (Fair Play, 58)

Subtitled, "A spectacle of revenge," the result was a genuine collective effort shaped by writer/actors as well as by stage managers and designers, drawing on the talents of Maureen White,

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she argues, are seen as "Bad Girls" and thus subversives who undermine women's traditional function as audience for -- and often butt of -- men's humour.

Barb Taylor, Tori Smith, Banuta Rubess, Ann-Marie Macdonald, and Suzanne Odette Khuri. The 1983 version was followed by a 1984 production performed at "community centres, women's shelters, a prison, law schools, Theatre Passe Muraille (Toronto) and Great Canadian Theatre Company (Ottawa)."[113] Another version was produced in 1985.

A stylized performance piece rather than strictly a play, This is for you, Anna requires that its four actors switch roles continually, with several actresses playing the part of Marianne Bachmeier simultaneously, a technique much in evidence in radical collective productions of the 1960s. Such representation of the protagonist is particularly useful in Anna as it serves to underscore the different interpretations of Marianne's behavior -- by herself and by those who judge and observe her -- to emphasize that the performance itself is a construct, just as an individual is a creation of the society and experiences which have shaped her. Furthermore, by disrupting audience expectations within the play itself, the production casts into doubt the stereotypes about women and women's "proper" behavior which came into play in the news coverage and trial following Marianne's act. The actors' constant switching of roles serves to reinforce the layered complexity of events surrounding Anna's murder, Marianne's own personality, and her action against her daughter's killer.

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[113] Maureen White et al, This is for you, Anna: A spectacle of Revenge, Canadian Theatre Review 43, (Summer, 1985), 127-166.

Furthermore, This is for you, Anna is circular in form, opening and closing with the "glass of milk" image and two similar, yet crucially different, phrases: "This is for you, Anna," and "I did it for you, Anna." The first statement arouses pathos at the mother's plight, the gesture of milk (nourishment, symbolic of the mother's nurturing role) offered to a daughter who now can never accept it. But the phrase also avoids sentimentality because of its underlying power and menace, implying that the mother's violent act is justifiable revenge for her daughter's brutal, undeserved death. In the same manner, the statement, "I did it for you, Anna," can be seen as double-edged: either a mother's triumphant, self-justifying cry or else her cowed explanation in the face of society's judgement against her. The power in such phrases lies in their openness to variable interpretation: audience members will find in each what meanings they wish -- and what they find serves to challenge and reveal their own sexual politics.

Although the performance piece deals with the victimization of women generally, and Anna and her mother in particular, it sets up a dynamic which refutes representation of women as victims. This refutation is achieved specifically by the action of revenge Marianne undertakes and generally by the discussion of myths and fairy tales pertaining to women which it explores and explodes. Further, This is for you, Anna, while sometimes following a loosely structured chronological plot in recounting the events in Marianne's life, does not deal in linear plot or characterization: its action begins with a central question -- "What happened?" -- and a crucial image -- the proferred glass of milk -- and then broadens its political focus by tracing wider and wider circles until the story of Marianne and Anna is, by both fact and implication, the story of Everywoman, or at least every mother and daughter who have struggled to overcome early experiences of brutality or neglect. Thus This is for you, Anna effectively moves from the particular to the general, from the interior to the exterior, even as it illustrates the feminist slogan, "the personal is political."

As is the case with many well-integrated feminist dramas, the script of This is for you, Anna embraces multiplicity: it is a well-connected kaleidoscope of anecdotes, myths, commentary, jokes, stories and facts which slide smoothly and convincingly into place, scene after scene. Although the play functions as a fast-paced and well-unified whole, it consists of a "prologue" and six different skits or themes: "The story of Agate," "The story of Marianne Bachmeier,""The story of Lucretia," "A Marianne Interlude," "How to be a victim," and the concluding "The story of

Marianne Bachmeier." The prevailing dramatic technique presents data and events and then explores them from a variety of perspectives, offering several viewpoints on the same topic as a means of challenging the audience to re-examine its own assumptions about Marianne's case, and thus about women in general. This device is a means of stirring the audience into a mental process of historical revision, much as did Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days in its re-presentation of Francis Beynon's life.

In the "Marianne Interlude," for instance, just as in Sharon Pollock's Blood Relations, the spectators are challenged to examine their preconceptions about a "murderess." The scene opens with three characters, Eena, Maria, and Jenny, asking, "Is this the face of a murderess?" The entire scene attempts to put in context the issue of family violence, as the women talk directly to the audience. Much of the effectiveness of this segment of the play derives from its expressionistic orchestration:

> Jenny claps. As she claps, the women turn their heads as in mug shots. The clapping speeds up and the turns become uncontrolled. They stop and then begin the box step again in unison. It continues through the following lines. (147).

The speakers talk about the men in their lives, and how those men regard them:

> Eena: (putting on sunglasses) Last night I overheard my husband joking with friends. He

> calls me the mattress. Imagine . . .
>
> M.1: (lighting cigarette) When we lived in Hanover his favorite game was to lock me out of the house in my negligee.
>
> Jenny: (putting on sunglasses) Once he drove me out to Etobicoke at three a.m. and told me to find my own way home.
>
> Maria: (inarticulate, putting on sunglasses) Well . . . um. . . you see . . . he . . .
>
> Jenny: He never uses the front door. He likes to startle me at the window.
>
> Eena: He's so funny. He says I have one breast the size of a lemon and the other the size of a grapefruit. (147)

One is reminded again of Regina Barreca's view of "humour" as a weapon men use against women to mask the anger beneath their jibes. The women's plucky recitation of their treatment by the men in their lives underscores the objectification and violence -- both physical and psychological -- they endure. And it is clear this litany represents general attitudes towards the treatment of women in society as a whole. As the scene continues, the women's discussion of violence becomes bolder, more detailed, and the lines indicate an increasing refusal to be passive in the face of men's aggression. Marianne (M. 1) recalls:

> After he raped me, I went home and I thought I'll just wash myself thoroughly and forget the whole thing. I was just about to step into the shower (stops box step) when I changed my

> mind and called the police. I got all dressed up for the courtroom. He got a year and six months. (150)

But when a woman is socialized to expect, and even accept, violence as an daily part of her life, change is difficult. Just as Sandy, in Judith Thompson's The Crackwalker, fights against Joe's drunken aggression but eventually reconciles with him, so does Marianne undertake yet another abusive relationship, with Chris, "the love of my life," who "thinks twice" before hitting her because she "threw a beer glass at his head" (152).

Juxtaposed to the brutal reality of the women's lives are the Romantic myths and fairytales which have shaped society's attitudes towards women down through the ages: for instance, Agate's betrayal by the "tall and handsome" baron ends in her obsessive pining which the nobleman rewards by ordering his guardsmen to "put out her eyes" because she has been spying on him (131), thus reducing her to lifelong schemes for revenge. Lucretia, on the other hand, "was an example to all women. She always knew the right thing to do" (140). When she is raped, she kills herself, out of shame. Or so the myth goes, but as "Arabella, Allegra and Amaranta" tell the story, they deconstruct it, giving it modern readings. Alicia, for instance, does not want Lucretia to remain passive in the face of Prince Tarquin's attack:

> But the next day, Lucretia surprised Prince

> Tarquin in his sleep, and poked out his eyes. (142)

This scene, however, shows that some women resist reshaping history by clinging to old myths, thereby continuing to be complicit in their own victimization. Arabella, for instance, wants to maintain the myth's original "truth," that Lucretia killed herself.

Two of the most celebrated images in This is for you, Anna arose directly out of the improvisational process -- the-glass-of-milk-image which opens and closes the play, and the pile-of-nails device which initiates "The story of Marianne Bachmeier" early in the play. Rubess recalls the genesis of the devices as almost accidental:

> . . .when I started working on the play I had a picture in my mind of a woman carrying cookies and milk for her child. I never considered it as an ending, just a jumping-off point. In fact, we tried a number of different endings, terrible ones, like turning to the audience and screaming. Then, out of the blue, during an improvisation of mine, the image simply arose out of my unconscious. It came from deep within me and it was immediately recognized by most of the company as the right image.
>
> Another image in Anna which elicited a diversity of response was that of the nails, which came out of an improvisation in which I had to tell Marianne's story in three minutes, using any one prop in the room. There happened to be some nails in the corner of the room and for a reason I can't explain I began to lay them out in a circle as I recited salient facts regarding Marianne Bachmeier's life. It was a case of the prop inspiring the action

> which became a universal action. (Fair Play, 72)

Part of the open-ended, transformative success of such images is that, even as they arise out of the unique chemistry of the collective, the audience members can make them their own, ascribing whatever import to them they wish. Rubess recalls that some viewers saw the nails as "nails in the coffin," while others saw them as weapons, "a hard object that penetrates" (72). Within the play itself, the performance of dropping the 31 nails one at a time as the salient facts of Marianne's life are recited is both aurally and visually stunning. And while the nails suggest that Marianne is in the grip of relentless events leading to "a thousand sins, a thousand tragedies," the script also emphasizes that she is not merely a passive victim. Marianne does not succumb to the victim's role:

> She never does kill herself. Unlike Marilyn Monroe.
> She decides to keep the child.
> She decides to keep the child. . . .
> Marianne walks into the courtroom and shoots him seven times. (133)

The powerful symbolism of the seven nails dropped to emphasize the seven bullets Marianne fires at Klaus Grabowski is reiterated by Anna's age at the time of her strangulation -- seven years.

The power of This is for you, Anna lies partly in the multiplicity of its messages and the fluctuations in its tone: it moves from bleak to humorous and back to bleak again. Furthermore, just as Monique Mojica's Princess Pocahontas and the Bluespots stimulates the audience to re-examine history as it pertains to North American Indian cultures, so does Anna constantly force its audience to reconsider foregone conclusions about both Marianne's killing and about women's position within society. It asks difficult questions about women's appropriate reactions in the face of violence, and although it focuses upon a Marianne's act of revenge, it is careful not to posit revenge or violence as the best solution for women who are abused. Marianne herself says she feels "sick" when she reads letters in which people suggest a variety of macabre punishments for Grabowski, including a man's desire to "soak him in gasoline and set his clothes on fire" (137). However, although Marianne also wishes "Anna wasn't dead," and later insists that her shooting of Grabowski "wasn't planned" (157), she also regrets that "I didn't get him in the face" (158). The compexity of the issue of guilt and complicity arises again in the person of Grabowski's fiancée, who says:

> He had nothing to do all day. He was a severely depressed man. Pretty little Anna comes knocking on his door. She didn't have to. He didn't force her to come there. He lets her in, he gets her some coke, some licorice . . . This is not a nice story. But he said in the courtroom that little Anna threatened to tell her parents that he'd touched her. And he swore in the courtroom that Anna said her

> father touched her there. Her father. And that her father paid her for it. He said it under oath. Look, I know him. He did not mean to, he just lost control. And he was sorry. (161)

The fiancée's argument that that Grabowski "was sorry" while Marianne apparently wasn't is significant: one woman is judging another for "unfeeling" behavior. Many women are on Marianne's side, but there are also those who blame her for letting Anna "dawdle about the streets like a little whore" (162). Such attitudes and phrases are reminiscent of Betty Lambert's Under the Skin, in which Maggie's next-door neighbour Renee echoes her brutal husband John in suggesting that young Emma is to blame for her own abduction and "was asking for it." Remarks of that sort illustrate that women's attitudes towards their own sorority can be as punitive and negative as those of the men who abuse them and the society which covertly condones such abuse by devaluing women. This point is underscored by the "stories" mothers tell daughters within the production: they are frequently so frightening, either the mother or the daughter interrupts them by saying "no" or "stop" to their growing violence.

Overall, This is for you, Anna, with its non-linear construction and Brechtian staging, is a powerful performance piece because of the questions it raises rather than because of the answers it gives. Although it utilizes sardonic juxtaposition of events and unsettling images rather than simple humour to subvert its audience's expectations, Anna nevertheless effects strong feelings of destabilization. It is relentless in its focus, examining a powerful women's issue -- sexual violence/male aggression -- from several angles and consistently undermining facile stereotypes while steadfastly refusing to be prescriptive in its representation of the problem. And while one senses the production is fuelled by profound outrage about Anna's case in particular and society's treatment of women in general, the collaborators never lose control of the protean aspect of their narrative, never allow that anger to surface as shrill declamation or strident polemic. By basing the production upon an actual event which occurred in another country, with a somewhat different culture, the creators of This is for you, Anna put the problem of violence against women in an international context and cause Canadian audiences to go beyond their own borders to examine the complex socio-economic and historic bases for acceptance of family violence and child abuse. Such contextualizing suggests a maturation of political awareness and production skills over the past 20 years, proving that feminist drama has come of age.

iii

Banuta Rubess was also a key figure in the development of another play which explores misogyny within an historical context: Smoke Damage, produced by Nightwood Theatre in 1983. This play reflects Rubess's interest in "revisioning" history, by which she means, "disclosing information . . . telling the story from a new perspective" (Fair Play, 67). Again, as with This is for you, Anna, the focus and setting of Smoke Damage is international, proving -- should such proof be necessary -- that Canadian playwrights can tackle topics beyond regional or national settings. Nightwood's "revisionist" plays appear to assume an audience already imbued with a basic understanding of feminist concerns specific to Canada; the existence of such an "educated" audience frees a production to move its dramatic representations beyond national borders.

In Smoke Damage, Rubess avoids being too serious or agit-prop (both are qualities she dislikes in drama) by combining a number of different dramatic forms and several historical eras. She recalls her involvement with the original Burning Times collective creation out of which Smoke Damage evolved:

> We did two weeks of improvisations in a search for characters for the five women in the company, gestural texts, story lines, etc. After these two weeks I took loads and loads of notes that had accumulated and went off for

> about three weeks to write a first draft. We then got together and workshopped the script. So I developed the whole story of the tourists who turn into terrorists, I developed their characters, and I made the decision that we would travel among several worlds: the Renaissance, the seventeenth century and the modern world. (Fair Play, 61)

As the script of Smoke Damage emphasizes, the bare-bones facts of the play are based upon historical events, but the modern-day authors have also added their interpretation of events:

> Smoke Damage is based on fact and fiction, poetry and personal anecdote. Throughout the play, the Dominican Inquisitors Kramer and Sprenger speak their minds. Their statements are questions from their "bestseller" -- the Malleus Maleficarum, or "The Hammer of the Witches." Endorsed by a papal bull in 1486, the manual quickly went through fourteen publications. It became a handbook for every priest, vicar and petty magistrate between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.
>
> We would like to stress that their statements are used verbatim and are not fabricated. A 1927 edition of the Malleus contained a glowing introduction by Montague Summers -- this is also quoted in the production.[114]

Here, the authors make clear that the misogyny of the late-fifteenth century church lives on well into the twentieth century, and remains a suitable issue of concern for modern audiences. Stage directions specify that although "the scenes from the past happen in a sixteenth-century atmosphere . . . the time is not definite, nor is the country." The production further undermines established historical parameters -- sending up, for example Montague Summers's belief that "heresy and witchcraft gravely threatened the well-being of the state" (83) -- by using absurdist techniques, and by interspersing such songs as "The Devil Made Me Do It" and "Walk the Pope" throughout the action. Aside from its collective development, and its focus upon women's concerns, a number of other feminist attributes may be discerned in Smoke Damage. From the outset, the script specifies doubling of roles for the play's five actors as well as the depiction of such male characters as Kramer and Sprenger "by various members of the cast, who affect subtly masculine airs. For satirical purposes, they are best played by women . . . ." One is reminded of the intent of parody in What Glorious Times They Had, when the stage directions specify that a number of balloons be used to signify "obedient" members of the Legislative Assembly. On a more serious note, however, the assignment of double roles to the actors also reinforces the transformative aspects of the drama. For instance, the script specifies casting as follows:

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[114] Banuta Rubess, Smoke Damage (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1985).

> Dr. Wendy Rice, a young assistant professor of history who hopes to attain celebrity status with her book about the witch hunts. The actor playing Wendy also plays Jacquette, the only woman in the sixteenth-century village who can

> read. . . .
>
> Selga, the tour guide for Exotic tours, who takes the audience through the sites of the witch hunts and is slowly transformed by her own information. The actor playing Selga also plays Maggie. . . .

The play's docudrama basis, as evidenced by its pastiche of factual sources, is constantly at odds with its satirical overtones, indicating that metadramatic techniques are at work throughout the production. For instance, the play opens with the "serious" "interrogation of Dr. Rice," which is offset by the theme music from the inane-but-once-popular television show "Bewitched" and the entry of ex-rock star Tart, posing "with a broom" (1). The audience is thus signalled that feminist revisionism -- with a naughty sense of humour -- is at work here. Throughout the play, vaudeville touches underscore the action, offering satirical political messages akin to those found in the earliest Parisian vaudeville of the Opera Comique.[115] In fact, the continual buffoonery of Kramer and Sprenger suggests the traditional two-man vaudeville teams, at least one member of which was often rendered ridiculous by his excessive pomposity or exaggerated sense of ego. And finally, as is evident by all of the previous techniques, Smoke Damage eschews traditional linear plot development, proceeding instead by a series of carefully orchestrated shifts between past and present.

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[115] Phyllis Hartnoll, Ed., The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 572.

The "modern" part of the plot sees a group of women -- the academic Wendy Rice, the rock star Tart and her sister Madeleine, and Frances, who is the reincarnation of a burned "witch" named Rebecca -- led on a tour of sites of witch hunts by Selga, who is gradually transformed from a crass tourist guide to a female subversive as she begins to understand the ramifications of the places she visits. The women's junket around Europe provides the opportunity for the play to cover a span of about two hundred years, from the start of the sixteenth century through to the end of the seventeenth, and to touch upon historical events in several European countries. Structured in two acts, each featuring a number of rapidly changing scenes and vignettes, one of the consistent features of the play is the recurrence of the "pact" scenes, three of which occur in each act, and the repetitive allegations and questioning from Kramer and Sprenger's Malleus Maleficarum. The pact scenes show the modern women becoming increasingly aware of their connection to the past and the "nine million" victims of the witch hunts, while the Malleus flashbacks show the inquisitors' double-bind "reasoning" which makes it impossible for women accused of witchcraft to prove their innocence, thereby reiterating the loathing of the female -- particularly the mysteries of female sexuality -- which is the subtext of the witch hunts.

Despite its consistent, undercutting black humour, Smoke Damage conveys the shocking evil of the hunt, its all-inclusive irrationality, and the constant betrayal and terror operating during the sinister era of the inquisition and its aftermath. The power and heft of the patriarchal church is clearly illustrated at the play's outset when the educated and rational Dr. Wendy Rice only briefly resists Sprenger and Kramer's manipulative interrogation. At first, Wendy meets the pair's standard questioning with questions of her own, but soon she is co-operating with them despite herself, recalling an incident from her youth when she wished death upon a boy named Rick, who humiliated her, and "a year later I found out Rick was run over by a truck" (3). Suddenly, instead of standing up to the inquisitors, Wendy is behaving in "typical" placatory female fashion, apologizing to them, trying to answer "correctly." This scene reveals the power of the church's voices of "authority," but it also suggests that women, by being too docile, contribute to their own exploitation and victimization.

Smoke Damage consistently shows how rumours and the fear of being implicated as a witch cause the women to attack one another and play into the inquisitors' hands. For instance, even though Rebecca is desperate to have her mother's letter read to her, she will not take it to Jacquette Henot (a pun on "not male?") to have it read because:

> I am fearful. I fear her evil eye. Give her
> the letter, cousin, she smiles on thee. (5)

But in this era when superstition is rife, when Christina refuses, Rebecca curses her: "A pox on thee, to the ninth generation." What saves the play from devolving into total darkness is the growing knowledge of the modern tourists who, as they come to understand the staggering degree of the crime against women, demand recognition of the injustice, or as Tart puts it, "a mega-event." And perhaps, as Frances suggests early in the play, the sites the women visit are "haunted," because as the journey progresses, each of the travellers begins to change, to be transformed by her growing knowledge of the past: Tart and Madeleine become increasingly excited about their connection to the martyred women through their great-aunt Isobel; as Frances struggles to cope with her grief over her mother's death, she becomes increasingly connected to her past life, when she was Rebecca, whose mother was executed as a witch in the sixteenth century. Even the crass Selga becomes increasingly human and in fact, by the play's end, is quite sanguine about the "hijacking" of the plane to Rome, a hijacking effected by a fake gun ("only" Madeleine's finger) and "grenades" which were really chocolates. It is interesting to note that the only character who is not transformed by the witch-hunts tour is the opportunistic academic, the ambitious historian Wendy Rice, who plans to get rich and famous on the fact that "the girls are in jail and they're glamorous, they're hot" (93). Rubess, who has a PhD in history, obviously enjoyed staging this joke on herself. A less intense play than _This is for you, Anna_, _Smoke Damage_ scores its best points by satirizing the very outrages it documents. However, a materialist feminist critic (or a skeptical viewer) might find the conclusion of _Smoke Damage_ too pat and its "transformations" too glib to be truly convincing. The play concludes with a sense that ends must be "tied up," and the audience sent home placated if not happy. On the other hand, _This is for you, Anna_ does not attempt to resolve any of the contradictions it presents, nor to answer any of the questions it forces the audience to face. And it clearly reiterates the importance of female solidarity. Of the two plays, _Anna_ seems the more sophisticated and _adult_ work because of the very tensions it sparks. Furthermore, perhaps because it focuses upon a more contemporary outrage, its impact upon the audience is more powerful.

iv

As we saw in Chapter II, one of feminist playwrights' strengths is their willingness to re-examine history in order to present new versions of "old" events. And as their confidence increases, it comes as no surprise that classic dramatic works should next fall beneath their scrutiny. Two new Canadian plays by feminist writers take different paths towards "recasting" theatre history: the wonderfully playful Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) by Ann-Marie MacDonald creates feminist humour from a re-examination of the dramatic premises of two of William Shakespeare's classic tragedies, Othello and Romeo and Juliet; Aphra, on the other hand, is an endeavour by a Calgary feminist troupe, Maenad Productions, to reclaim from the dramatic dustbin the "lost" female playwright Aphra Behn. Both these plays are wittily self-conscious, using metadrama simultaneously to comment upon the theatre works they explore while also questioning the authority of specific critical tenets leading to an inviolable "canon" from which certain plays are arbitrarily excluded. Such self-reflexiveness, which provides a delicious dramatic layering, is akin to the self-conscious play within post-modern fiction.

First produced in Calgary's Pumphouse Theatre in the mid-winter of 1991, Aphra[116] takes as its topic the injustice of seventeeth-century playwright Aphra Behn's dismissal by "posterity" because she has dared to offend "that strange thing called moral opinion" (2). In the Calgary production, three actresses (Nancy Cullen, Alison Whitley and Catherine Myles) play all seven characters, skillfully metamorphosing from one persona and gender to another. The two-act play is presented in a series of vignettes interspersed with enactments of Behn's scorned play, The Widow Ranter (also known as The History of Bacon in Virginia) which indeed was produced posthumously in 1690, in a dreadfully miscast and bungled production. Aphra is a charming melange of imagined conversations and detail faithful to history -- both Mary Betterton (the actress Mary Sanderson who was married to the Restoration stage great Thomas Betterton, referred to simply as Tom in the Maenad play) and Betty Currer (also an actress) are historical figures. And yet, as the stage directions specify, the play is also deliberately "ephemeral and minimal in setting . . . . sometimes the action takes place in Aphra's rooms in seventeenth century London. Sometimes it is adrift in time and space." As the play moves from scenes before and after the playwright's death, Aphra is both a character and a ghost within the story of her last days, as befits a personality whom mortality has claimed and posterity has shunned. And yet, despite this timelessness, Aphra functions much as does a docudrama, reclaiming events from the past (in this case the biography of a scorned woman writer) and recording facts of a previous era for the illumination of a modern audience. For instance, the play's final scenes capture the enactment of The Widow Ranter, while commenting upon the real-life tribulations the play encountered when it was mounted by Behn's friend, the minor writer George Jenkins. The skilled layering of fact and invention in Aphra are evident in Betty's disgruntled comments upon her role as the Widow Ranter:

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[116] Nancy Cullen, Alexandria Patience and Rose Scollard, Aphra (Unpublished playscript, Maenad Productions). Initial production Feb. 17-March 9, 1991.

> Here I am about to play a torrid scene with . . . Samuel Sanford. A man better suited to playing Caliban. He's round shouldered, meagre faced, spindle-shanked, splay footed. It's the worst casting job in the history of the Duke's. (53)

And, indeed, dramatic history tells us Sanford did his best acting as Iago. Charles II is said to have described him as "the best Villain in the world," while a seventeenth-century contemporary pictured him thus:

> Round-shoulder'd, Meagre-fac'd, Spindle-shank'd, Splay-footed, with a sour Countenance and long lean Arms.[117]

Such was not the actor Behn would have chosen were she alive, and such an unprepossessing hero certainly provides no match for the lusty Amazonian widow Ranter. As Aphra mimics events in the (brief) stage life of The Widow Ranter, the reputation of which was indeed sabotaged by censorship and a terrible production, the similar brevity of the playwright's own life and fame is poignantly clear.

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[117] George Woodcock, The English Sappho (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), p. 219.

By virtue of its wit and its clever deployment of dramatic history, Aphra delineates the limitations placed upon seventeenth-century women, particularly if they wished to take the smallest step off the path of conventional behavior. Aphra Behn was an individualistic and adventurous woman: she travelled as far afield as Surinam; she was badly used by the government of Charles II as a spy in Antwerp in 1666; she did time in debtors' prison. She chafed constantly under the restrictions placed on women of her era and considered marriage immoral if made for reasons of economy. Perhaps most exceptional of all, she managed to support herself by writing plays, poetry and a number of novels (predating Daniel Defoe by nearly 50 years). The play's movement back and forth through time not only captures the erratic tenor of Aphra's life, it allows the playwrights to make free usage of dramatic irony. Throughout the play, the irony of a given situation is frequently doubled: not only does the modern audience know something more than the characters on stage, the knowing characters play on the fact of what the audience knows. For example, in the preface, Aphra addresses the members of the audience directly, paying them a mocking courtesy:

> There were many obstacles to playwriting in my

> day, not the least of which was poverty . . . . But the biggest, chiefest enemy was that strange thing called moral opinion.
> It was a two-fold creature this moral opinion. . . . On the one side it was decrepit, aged and moribund, clinging to life -- like an old husband who would compel you to lie in the wide moth eaten bed his forefathers lived and died in. . . .
> The other side of this morality was female. Yes a woman. Upright, delicate of manner, so delicate that you would wonder at her impudence that would pretend to understand the thing called bawdy, she was the enemy of all that is natural, original or spontaneous. I understand you have such bonafide ladies even today. (2-3)

From Aphra's address, modern listeners realize that little has changed in "three hundred and two years": the obstacles to the craft of playwriting are not much different today than in Behn's time, and "morality" still speaks with both a male and female tongue. Here the playwrights make clear that women are no gentler, wiser, or kinder than their male counterparts if set on saving "that artificial thing we call society, to preserve it from all intrusion of wit or novelty or imagination" (3). Aphra says she was able to keep the "two fold monster" at bay while alive but after her death it "completely and utterly vanquished" her.

The power of "morality" is personified within Aphra as the masked and veiled Morality Man and Morality Woman, who provide a snide running commentary upon Aphra:

> MAN: The wit of her comedies seems to be

> generally acknowledged.
> WOMAN: And it is equally acknowledged that they are very indecent, on which account they ought not only to be held in the utmost detestation but cast into eternal oblivion.
> MAN: Even if her life remained pure it is amply evident that her mind was tainted to the very core. (4)

However, like many busybodies, the Morality Man and Woman are also titillated by rumors of Aphra's life, and as they recount her flaws -- "She's nasty!", "She's lewd!", "She's unclean!", "She's bawdy!", "She's rude!" -- it's clear their disapproval is heavily tempered with prurience. And they envy her because she is "Audaciously, Quite unacceptably ALIVE!!" (7). The play's joke here is that although Morality has attempted to silence Aphra, the very explication of that effort in Aphra thwarts the forces of censorship and dismissal. And of course, anyone familiar with women playwrights' struggle to gain recognition will savor the modern resonance of Aphra's struggle to win respect as a writer.

Perhaps the most delightful aspect of Aphra is its presentation, in the metadramatic play-with-the-play format, of the rowdy and raucous Widow Ranter, who is both a wonderful character in her own right and, one suspects, a dramatization of the woman Aphra herself would be if she had dared to fully pursue her alter-ego. Furthermore, the invented character of the Widow Ranter serves within the play to illustrate the conflict between two actual characters, Aphra's friends Mary and Betty. Despite Mary's sympathy and love for Aphra, she disapproves of the Widow:

> The Widow Ranter is improper . . . . in other plays women pass as men for reasons of necessity or intrigue. The widow plays a man because . . . she likes it. (12)

Betty, on the other hand, delights in the character and plays her with gusto. What becomes clear in Mary's characterization is a certain intriguing ambiguous androgyny about Behn's creation. The Widow is not only a protest against the passive roles assigned to women by seventeenth-century ideas of decorum, it is also a vigorous sendup of accepted male behavior. The woman in man's "britches" manages to parody the rake so beloved of Restoration comedy, as Betty's enactment of Ranter shows:

> Here boy, some pipes and a bowl of punch. (To SURELOVE) You know my humour, Madam, I must smoke and drink in a morning or I am mawkish all day. (14)

Yet in the next breath, the Widow is poking fun at men while clearly aware of the realities of her own attraction to and for them. Ranter chafes Surelove for regretting her husband's illness:

> Good news! I don't know how you put up with him so long! An old fusty weather beaten skeleton, as dried as stock fish and much of the same hue. Come, come. Here's to the next. May he be young, heaven I beseech thee. (15)

Surelove reminds Ranter that she's indebted to "an old man who died and left you worth fifty thousand pound," but the realistic Widow realizes that were it not for her fortune, "I might sit still and sigh, and cry out, a Miracle! a Miracle! at the sight of man within my doors" (16). Consistently throughout _Aphra_, both proper female roles and Romantic conventions are tossed rudely on their ears by the rapscallion Widow, whose lustiness breaches the bounds of feminine grace and whose energy quite overpowers any suggestion that she sit demurely awaiting a suitor. Instead, the Widow becomes the pursuer -- just as Aphra became fame's aggressive suitor as a means of expressing "my masculine part the poet in me" (39).

The doubling and androgynous characterization is a constant technique within _Aphra_. In the "birth" vignette, the female actor playing the Moral Man is transformed into the "YOUNG APHRA," who is born "kicking and lunging" because "I mean to be a hero" (27). In this inspired scene, viewers must incorporate the idea of a woman playing a man who in turn plays a female child: if that "gender-benderization" does not challenge accepted stereotypes, what will? Young Aphra is indoctrinated as to proper womanly pursuits:

> Beginning at eight and ending before twelve you ought to employ yourself in dressing . . . Till two at dinner. Till five in visits. Till seven at the theatre. Till nine walking in the park. Ten, supper with your husband. (28)

To which, the adult Aphra, the destabilizing influence, interjects, "Or with your lover if your husband be not home." A dismayed young

Aphra asks if there is "nothing more to a woman's life than that?" -- a question Aphra obviously asked herself and answered by determining to pursue the "more."

Throughout Aphra, Maenad's playwrights both subvert Behn's "proper" biography and assert her right to different treatment by history. By reiterating her story from a feminist perspective, Maenad's play-within-a-play production of The Widow Ranter functions as a nose-thumbing at Restoration-era morality while broadly hinting that contemporary society is little more enlightened when it comes to accepting women of action or women playwrights. Aphra, thus, can be enjoyed -- and interpreted -- on a number of levels: as a feminist re-examination of a slighted historical figure; as a critique of gender stereotyping of a past era; as a revelation of the exclusionary nature of traditional, male-dominated theatre history; and, best of all, as a meld of all of the previous interpretations underscored by an awareness of each issue's present resonance.

v

Despite its longstanding interest in collective creation, it is ironic that Nightwood Theatre's most successful play to date is a commissioned work written primarily by one person, Ann-Marie MacDonald. Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), which might be considered a radical feminist improvisation on Shakespeare, is the most polished and theatrically sophisticated of the four plays discussed in this chapter, fully deserving of the national acclaim it has won. Although MacDonald was a contributor to both _This is for you, Anna_ and _Smoke Damage_, she wrote _Goodnight Desdemona_ on her own, producing the first 100-page draft in just three weeks. Although she got "an exciting taste of what collective creation was like" at Theatre Passe Muraille, MacDonald credits Banuta Rubess's ideas for _This is for you, Anna_ with sparking her commitment to "radical theatre" (_Fair Play,_ 132). MacDonald recalls that:

> _Anna_ was my first truly collective experience as well as my first feminist theatre experience and for me it is a seminal work and a major turning point personally, artistically and personally. Meeting Maureen White, Banuta Rubess and Kim Renders [_Anna_'s originators] changed my life. Creating a show and a style from the ground up, collectively to boot, is one of the hardest things in the world to do. You go on faith a lot of the time. (133)

MacDonald observes that although her generation of "fringe theatre artists" is now "no longer interested in working collectively all that much," nevertheless, there are "a lot of lessons learned from the collective process that we continue to apply." In fact, she maintains that, "if I didn't have a radical grounding in collective creation I wouldn't really stick to my artistic goals and have the personal ethics that I do have" (133).

Equally integral to MacDonald's work, she says, is her thorough feminism. The grounding in "gender consciousness" which critics such as Michelene Wandor deem essential as a base of subtext to feminist drama is clearly in place in MacDonald's life. She says she was born a feminist, born aware of male-female differences, "and then made it my business to understand it." But it would seem that MacDonald is not a doctrinaire feminist committed to one narrow line of political thought. She states that she does not believe there is only "one kind" of feminism:

> There are all kinds of schools of feminist thought and obviously I'm going to be too feminist for some people and not nearly enough for others. For example, in a play like Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), there are a lot of sexist jokes which I find hilarious because of the context, but a purist might take offence. Yet the entire situation is a feminist situation. It's like the woman who's been done wrong and in the end she gets her own. What could be more feminist? (134)

MacDonald is not interested in writing agitprop and dislikes "a lot of writing by men" because of its "undue solemnity, a kind of addiction to the dark, hopeless side of things" (134). Such writing bores her "because it strikes me as self-important and indulgent." She likes writing comedy, she says, because:

> Comedy is a "bad girl" thing to do. Poking fun at institutions is iconoclastic and girls are not supposed to be rebels. When I write comedy I take an uncompromising view and try to weld as many people as I can into the experience. I figure it's open season on everyone and everything. I don't tear a strip

> off the unwitting audience, though. (136)

In other words, MacDonald attempts to be inclusive in her writing, and hopes for as broadly based an audience as possible; she is not speaking only to women or to feminists exclusively, but she nevertheless believes in using the subversive tool of humour.

Certainly in Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), MacDonald blithely sends up a number of targets with equal verve: academia, male pomposity, female timidity, the notion of heroism, even Shakespeare himself. She sees parody as an essential feminist tool:

> It's like opening up a trunk that used to be full of instruments of torture and now everything has turned into toys. When you reclaim and transform ideas and methods that have been used against you as a woman, you become empowered. Subversion of this kind is healthy. (142)

Certainly the laughter induced by Goodnight Desdemona was healthy, as was the play's climax wherein the former "mouse" Constance Ledbelly solves the mystery of the text she has been pursuing and in the process integrates the loving and the fierce aspects of herself in the true Jungian exploration of her unconscious. Best of all, Constance has not been "saved" by a hero; she has "saved" herself by becoming heroic in her own (non-masculine) way, by transforming herself through active participation in her own quest. Director Banuta Rubess describes MacDonald's first "solo" script as "her own alchemical manuscript."[118] Rubess praises the script for the scope of its content, its theatricality and "the place it gives women":

> The women of Goodnight Desdemona are always active, always pushing the piece forward, threatening, seducing, giving up, rallying, stabbing, kissing, embracing, thinking. (9)

In short, the play's women are fully-fledged human beings who grapple with their own destiny, who are not just accessories to the male action on stage.

Much of the charm in watching Goodnight Desdemona lies in its playfulness and its immense and accomplished theatricality. There is much "magical" stage business, and MacDonald is ingenious in her mischievous revisioning of Shakespeare, perhaps the greatest (and most shameless) revisionist borrower of them all. The play is really a series of puzzles and mysteries, with all the clues foreshadowed at the outset in the three vignettes showing Othello's smothering of Desdemona, Juliet's fall upon the rapier, and the beleaguered Constance Ledbelly's fit of pique as she pitches both her fountain pen and manuscript into the waste basket (13). Further hints come from the "chorus," who outlines Constance's true task: to draw the "mind's opposing archetypes" from the shadows and unite them "into a mirror that reflects one soul." The puns and inside-Shakespearean jokes begin early:

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[118] Banuta Rubess, "Introduction," Ann-Marie MacDonald, Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990), p. 8.

> And in this merging of unconscious selves there lies the mystic 'marriage of true minds.' (14)

And MacDonald launches her play with metadrama almost instantly, recreating (as did The Bard) plays within the play as scenes from Othello and Romeo and Juliet are enacted while she works on her dissertation. Constance feels a "wise fool" is missing from both tragedies which, after all, "turn on flimsy mistakes." Constance's thesis argument is now clear:

> I postulate that the Gustav Manuscript, when finally decoded, will prove the prior existence of two comedies by an unknown author; comedies that Shakespeare plundered and made over into ersatz tragedies! It is an irresistible -- if wholly repugnant-- thought. (21)

Even more repugnant than that thought is the arrival in Constance's office of the patronizing, lazy but self-satisfied Professor Claude Night, for whom Connie has been writing essays and reports because she is smitten. The scene is a masterful skewering of generations of some male experts' reliance on female handmaidens to conduct their research and bear their putdowns simultaneously. Night tells Connie, "You have such an interesting little mind," before collecting the "latest commission" from her (24), and informing her he's off to Oxford with a Rhodes Scholar named Ramona (25). Constance's reward, for all her toiling, is "a lovely post in Regina," a place she hates because "its a absolute nightmare landscape of absolutes and I'm a relativist, I'll go mad" (26).

Fortunately, before that happens, Constance is "magicked" into the wastebasket and thence to Othello's citadel at Cyprus, where he and Iago are enacting the tiresome "Handkerchief scene." Acting on an impulse, Constance "revises" the Shakespearean text by plucking Desdemona's hanky from Iago's vest, thereby earning Othello's respect as a "learned oracle" (31). Once Connie has so audaciously o'er-turned the text, all manner of revelations are possible: she learns that Othello is a boastful bore, that Iago is truly a one-dimensional villain who will ply his jealousy routine on Desdemona, making poor Connie the suspect, and that Desdemona's "violent streak" is even firmer than Constance had suspected. Not only does the audience see Desdemona's true, fierce self revealed, Connie makes her own self-discovery:

> I wish I were more like Desdemona.
> Next to her, I'm just a little wimp.
> A rodent. Road-kill. Furry tragedy . . .
> O what would Desdemona do to Claude,
> had she the motive and the cue for passion
> that I have?. . . .
> To think, I helped him use me, a gull, a
> stooge, a swine adorned with mine own pearls,
> a sous-chef, nay! a scull'ry maid that slaved
> to heat hell's kitchen with the baking stench

> of forty-thousand scalding humble-pies. . . .
> (49)

So enraged is Constance by her own gullibility, by her need for "Vengeance!!!" she disarms Iago, who is teaching Desdemona to wield a sword, and almost kills him before Desdemona intervenes. Constance for the first time realizes the power of her own anger:

> Dear God, I could have murdered that poor man.
> I saw a flash of red before my eyes.
> I felt a rush of power through my veins.
> I tasted iron blood inside my mouth.
> I loved it! (50)

The shock of the truth is too much for Connie: she faints.

Fortunately, Connie is saved from the jealous Desdemona's wrath by page one of the "foolscap" she seeks, which spirits her off to Verona just in time to intervene in another text and halt a fight between Mercutio and Tybalt, thereby breaking the long-standing feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. In this new venue, Connie is taken for a Greek boy, Constantine, by the lusty bi-sexual Romeo, who falls in love with her, and for a new love interest/victim by the fickle, hot-blooded Juliet, who sees her as a change from Romeo, with whom she is already bored. As the competing libidos of Romeo and Juliet quarrel over Constance, making a farce of the insipid tragic tale of the innocent "young lovers," Constance must revert to her schoolmarm self to admonish the young pair: "You kids, now that's enough, just settle down" (67).

Just as Desdemona has taught Constance to recognize her fierce self, so Juliet teaches her to admit her loving, passionate side. At first, Connie balks, declaiming love as "a bond of servitude; a trap that sly deceptors lay for fools" (70), admitting only that she "had a crush" for Claude Night. But, with Juliet's coaching, she dares to explore her psyche further:

> Love. Love! I love that shit, Claude Night!
> Amour -- at-first-sight, in plain view, a coup
> de foudre,
> la vie en soir, amo, amas, amat!!!
> There. I've said it. So what do I do now? (71)

Fortunately, Constance is too busy with her quest to take up Juliet's suggestion that she "impale thy cleav'ed heart upon a sword." Instead, she makes plans to meet Juliet in the graveyard, where, for a kiss, she will trade the name of the "author" which she purports to know. In the cemetery, a frightened Constance meets -- who else?-- a ghostly Yorick, who punningly tells her the "author" is herself ("Yo-o-u-u're it."), but Connie misses the point of both Yorick's jokes and an outraged Tybalt's sword. Just as Constance is ready to succumb to Juliet's exhortations to passion, yet another page of the manuscript crops up, this one telling her to "Get Desdemon and merge this trinity, or never live to see another Birthdy" (78). The "warp effects" begin and bring Desdemona to rise, "a Phoenix from the pillows," enraged and ready to smother Constance. As the gender-bending farce builds to its conclusion, everyone convenes in the crypt where Desdemona and Juliet bicker over Constance, the former urging Connie to accompany her and kill, the latter urging, "Nay, stay and die" (84). Infuriated, Constance has another of her insights, telling the two heroines, "nay" in forceful terms:

> I've had it with all the tragic tunnel vision around here. . . . life is a hell of a lot more complicated than you think! Life -- real life -- is a big mess. Thank goodness. And every answer spawns another question; and every question blossoms with a hundred different answers; and if you're lucky you'll always feel somewhat confused. (85)

Connie sees the two heroines for what they are -- Desdemona is gullible and violent; Juliet is in love with death -- and realizes she cannot save them from themselves. However, the two vow to "live by questions, not by their solution," and to trade their certainty for confusion, proving that Constance has in fact been succesful in her action, she has "revised" the text. And finally, with a little final prodding from Yorick, Constance realizes, "I'm the author" (86). With outrageous stage effects, an unconventional story line, wit, humour, and madcap pacing, MacDonald has written a thoroughly feminist play where women are the centre of attention and the focus of the action. Without didacticism, she has made the point that women must fully develop all aspects of their personalities, "mingling and unmingling opposites," if they are to fully realize themselves as independent persons.

In the previous four plays, we see feminist playwrights taking a good, hard look at "reality" -- history as it has been presented through male eyes -- and decide to view it slant, as Emily Dickinson would say. However, when they take up an issue and re-vise it from a feminist perspective, the result is not simply boring, didactic agitprop. Instead, such plays as Aphra and Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) use as a jumping-off point existing dramas and long-standing dramatic history to make feminist points about women's roles, about self-determination and about the need to question "reality" using one's own senses and sound judgement. Even in a much angrier play, such as This is for you, Anna, feminist playwrights do not sacrifice complexity to polemics. For instance, in dramatizing the "case" of Marianne Bachmeier's shooting of the man who killed her daughter, Nightwood Theatre raises a number of profound issues about the nature of revenge, women's complicity in their own sexual exploitation and society's need to find scapegoats to explain away its own acute social ills. Often, as in the case of Smoke Damage, historical events are presented in a non-sequential fashion, melding past with present so that modern audiences will be provoked to recognize their own connection to events of yore -- and the way attitudes shaped by such occurrences linger on and on.

vi

This thesis has undertaken to demonstrate that feminist drama has become an increasingly viable aspect of English-Canadian theatre within the past 30 years. Although I find the concept of an "acceptable canon" anathema to feminist criticism because it establishes hierarchies (or pecking orders?), I nevertheless have concluded that there are certain traits which can be said to mark feminist drama. Further, I have attempted a certain consistency in my own criticism by admitting my tendency to examine plays from a materialist-feminist position, a position which takes into account historical, economic, and social factors within women's lives. In an attempt to provide some context for the subsequent discussion, Chapter I includes an overview of the variety of ideas embraced within feminist philosophical thought. The chapter concludes that feminist drama may generally be identified by such traits as gender-consciousness, to use Helene Keyssar's phrase; by indifference to linear progression; by focus upon interior or personal issues; by surreal or dream-world elements; and by its emphasis upon the possibility of transformation in women characters' lives. These traits function as "guiding ghosts" for the subsequent five chapters' mapping of dramatic territory as I explore particular plays to show how different playwrights succeed -- or fail -- to create feminist dramas.

Chapter II examines six plays -- What Glorious Times They Had, Red Emma, Waiting for the Parade, Maggie & Pierre, What Is To Be Done? and The Fighting Days -- which focus upon a specific woman in history or the role of particular women characters at a pivotal historical period. The chapter concludes that although all six plays are women-centred, not all of them achieve the status of truly feminist drama. For instance, John Murrell's Waiting for the Parade, despite its genuine sympathy for its characters, is not a feminist play because it affords the women it portrays no chance for genuine transformation of their lives. The most convincingly feminist play is Wendy Lill's The Fighting Days because it successfully shows that a woman's private process of growth and maturation is inseparable from her commitment to public activism and social change. Such a drama fuses the necessary "interior" process of gender-consciousness and political analysis with an active "exterior" search for societal change. In short, The Fighting Days demonstrates that integration of a woman's private and public realms offers her the optimum chance for fullest self-realization.

However, as essential as the fusion of private and public selves is to feminism, such integration does not come without great struggle and pain. Chapter III examines six plays in which women characters attempt, with varying degrees of success, to find self-definition beyond domestic realm while attempting to accommodate traditional expectations (their own and others') about women's appropriate role within society. None of the heroines in the six plays examined -- The Lodge, Crabdance, Blood Relations, Inside Out, War Babies, and Memories of You -- fully escapes society's demands, yet each is creative in seeking self-expression. Several of the playwrights discussed in this chapter -- notably Beverley Simons, Sharon Pollock, Margaret Hollingsworth, and Wendy Lill -- employ techniques of metadrama to demonstrate their characters' need for alternative choices and even alternative personas. Simons's protean Sadie is a "games mistress" within her own house and life, brilliantly orchestrating events within her domestic "kingdom." Pollock's Lizzie Borden augments what may have been revenge upon her parents with a relentless refusal to answer society's questions about her "true" identity. And Lill's Elizabeth finds the courage to confront her own past, admit her errors and move forward into a new opportunity in a new location. These plays are most potent when their creators skillfully mingle events from the past and present in non-linear fashion, requiring the audience to question its own expectations about the characters portrayed and thus to confront stereotypes about women's roles.

Women's domestic duties and women's sexuality are clearly enmeshed one within the other, but for the purposes of simpler analysis, they are discussed within separate chapters in this thesis. Chapter IV deals with women's sexuality, essentially an "interior" facet of their lives, which is afflicted or crippled by "exterior" factors, particularly misogyny and Western society's traditional views about the inappropriateness of women's expression of desire. Eight plays with a focus upon female sexuality are examined: Alli Alli Oh and Islands; Hooking for Paradise; Jennie's Story and Under the Skin; The Crackwalker, White Biting Dog, and I Am Yours. In each of these plays, sexuality is at the root of characters' problems. In Margaret Hollingsworth's examination of a lesbian relationship in the Alli Alli Oh and Islands, for instance, intimacy eludes both characters as each ultimately is limited by her own private fears and needs. And in Betty Lambert's two powerful plays, Jennie's Story and Under the Skin, characters are literally destroyed by male lust and objectification of women. Ironically, the most hopeful plays in this chapter (despite the disfunctional nature of many characters within them) are Judith Thompson's three, The Crackwalker, White Biting Dog, and I Am Yours. What is encouraging about Thompson's work is her ability to explore human sexuality in a powerfully humane way. In a sense, Thompson might be termed a "post-feminist" playwright because, although she clearly understands feminist politics, she is able to examine how gender stereotypes entrap and cripple both men and women, and to show how both male and female characters are victims of false or ill-founded expectations about relationships. While none of the women characters in the previous eight plays is able to liberate herself from sexual oppression or repression, I would consider these women-centred plays feminist because they accord primary importance to women's experiences of desire and sexuality.

If we can accept that North American culture has until very recently unthinkingly accorded women a marginal position within it, it takes no leap of the imagination to realize how "doubly marginalized" are Native women. Chapter V explores how four playwrights have depicted the lives of Native women. Work by two male playwrights -- George Ryga (The Ecstacy of Rita Joe) and Tomson Highway (The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing) -- falls short of feminist status, but the women playwrights shine. In Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, Monique Mojica presents a historical re-visioning of Native women's lives which is both humorous and thoughtful. By far the chapter's most powerful play is Jessica, co-written by Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths, a play which examines the potent -- and ultimately triumphant force -- of Native female spirituality. As the character Jessica comes to understand herself and her own heritage, she unleashes her own powers of self-transformation and ceases to be anyone's victim.

Considering feminism's emphasis upon non-hierarchical, supportive relationships, it is no surprise to find that the strongest and most sophisticated feminist plays charted in this thesis spring from a collective-creation process. Chapter VI explores four plays which might be termed prototypic feminist dramas -- were the idea of prototypes not a dubious one for feminist criticism to embrace. All four of these plays -- Smoke Damage, This is for you, Anna, Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) -- arise out of distinctly committed feminist theatre-communities and explore women-centred issues with brio and innovation. More theatrical than literary in their orientation, these four dramas wittily "play" with theatre conventions and assumptions to stimulate audiences to question their assumptions about both art and life, and to suggest that both are "constructs" arising from a confluence of several factors including societal norms, economic realities and political pressures. Of the four plays, Ann-Marie MacDonald's Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) is the most witty and brilliantly assured; as the play's protagonist, a mousy academic named Constance, pits her intellect against the unresolved mystery of her doctoral dissertation, she is thrown helter-skelter into the very Shakespearean world she studies. Constance's triumph over her own timorousness and her resolution of the dramatic "mystery" is achieved with humour, insight and wonderful theatrical machinations.

It is evident that a number of feminist plays are now firmly ensconced within the ranks of Canadian drama, there for the viewing and reading, if we care to discover them. Frequently protean in nature, they often employ humour and metadrama as a means of making palatable their strong social criticisms. And they may sometimes spring out of a spirit of collective creation, where a combined rather than an individual vision conveys the hopes and dreams of female characters as well as their pain and defeat. The best feminist drama is inclusive, not exclusive, all the better to stimulate as many spectators as possible to re-examine their attitudes about women's roles within society. Furthermore, much feminist drama toys with the very dramatic conventions it employs, forcing the audience to recognize that just as a play is a construct, so are individuals "constructed" by the society they inhabit. One of the major tasks of feminist drama is to "re-vise" the presentation of women's lives and women's history, casting women as central, rather than peripheral or marginal, characters in their own stories. The growing skill with which English-Canadian playwrights envision their alternate worlds leaves no doubt that a sizable body of feminist drama exists -- and is flourishing.

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